

IMAGINING IRAN: CONTENDING POLITICAL DISCOURSES IN MODERN IRAN

By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2008

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“To Sheki, Annahitta, and Ava with Love”

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am very grateful and deeply indebted to many people whose assistance made this project possible. First and foremost, I thank my wife, Sheki, whose patience and support were indispensable. I also thank my two daughters, Annahitta and Ava, for the sacrifices each made on my behalf.

Two years of research have gone into this dissertation, which would not have been possible without the indispensable influence, guidance, direction, and inspiration of the people in the Department of Political Science at the University of Florida. I must thank Professor Goran Hyden, who influenced my decision in starting the Ph.D. program in 2003. Without Professor Hyden, I probably would have stayed in Miami.

I am most indebted to Professor Ido Oren, who stimulated my initial interest in the politics of identity, interpretative epistemology, and the significance of history. During the past two years, Dr. Oren has spent numerous hours listening, reading, and constructively criticizing my work. Without Professor Oren, my approach would have been less bold and more conventional. Professor Oren taught me innovative ways of looking at history, politics, and identities.

Most significantly, I am grateful to Professor Leann Brown who has been the guidepost for directing this research. Whenever I was in need of guidance or inspiration, her office was my first and only destination. Professor Brown has a keen way of explaining the most complex issues in the shortest and fastest way imaginable. Without her help and suggestions, I could not have finished this work.

I also thank Professor Badredine Arfi, who opened up a new window of understanding into a world that would not have otherwise existed. He introduced me to a body of literature that changed the direction of my research in fundamental ways.

Finally, since I entered the Ph.D. program in 2003, Suzanne Lawless-Yanchisin has helped me ways that are too numerous to mention. I must simply say thank you.

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School  
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

IMAGINING IRAN: CONTENDING POLITICAL DISCOURSES IN MODERN IRAN

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August 2008

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Major: Political Science

Since the 1906 Constitutional Revolution that established the first representative government in the Middle East, all Iranian regimes have aimed to build a modern nation-state. But the main body of the literature depicts the 1979 Islamic Revolution, which resulted in the establishment of the Islamic Republic, as a failure of Iran's struggle to modernize. This dissertation moves away from the false dichotomy of modernism versus traditionalism and instead conducts an in-depth survey of Iranian political discourses dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Iran first encountered the West. Tracing competing interpretation of Iran's political development describes and analyzes how the Iranian state elites have had competing ideas of Iran as a nation-state.

Inspired upon post-structuralist and post-colonialist literature written by Charles Taylor, Michel Foucault, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, and Edward Said, the research examines the social content of competing political discourses in Iran. A comparative analysis of pre-modern and modern texts illustrates that six signifiers show up in the representation practices and policies of all political discourses since the late 1800s. These basic signifiers are security, development, law, democracy, class equality, and Islam. By showing how these basic signifiers

coalesce to form a particular official state discourse, my dissertation examines how contending discourses shaped the basis of Iran's state building, nationalism, and foreign policies since the early 1900s.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

How did the Iranian state elites imagine, interpret, and practice the politics of nation-state building in modern Iran? In the 1800s, the state elites imagined the West as an ideal model for building a secured, developed, lawful, democratic, just, and moral state. By the late 1970s, a majority of the people interpreted the West as the source of Iran's insecurity, underdevelopment, illegal, undemocratic, unjust, and immoral state. This interruption in the meaning of what was considered "Western" or "Iranian" had occurred several times since Iran's first encountered the West, and each new interruption in the meaning of the West or Iran was a particular interpretation of competing extant social reality.

From 1978 to 1979, united in body and spirit, the voices of several million urban Iranians turned into a unified call demanding "death to the shah and death to America." Constitutive of the metaphorical demand for the "death" of the regime of the shah was the birth of a new imagining of Iran that had not previously been imaginable for many in the West and some in Iran.<sup>1</sup> In the course of a few months, the regime of Mohamad Reza Shah Pahlavi (who reigned 1941 to 1979) collapsed like a house of cards, and the shah's "Great Civilization" lay in ruins.<sup>2</sup> The undisputable leader of this massive revolt was Ayatollah Khomeini, a religious leader who called for the establishment of an Islamic state.

By 1978, the possibility of establishing an Islamic state, whose ideals had been put forth quite clearly for at least two decades, was self-evident to millions of Iranians. But for most in the West and some in Iran, those ideals were merely emotional, irrational, and fanatical calls for a

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<sup>1</sup> In Farsi, the word "shah" is used as a common noun, which simply means "king," but it is also used as a compound proper noun, for example, Reza Shah, Mohamad Reza Shah. From this point, as a proper noun, I capitalize the word "Shah," but as a common noun, I will not capitalize it.

<sup>2</sup> In 1971, Mohamad Reza Shah claimed that Iran had reached the gate of a "Great Civilization."

return to an Islamic past. For political participants, as well as leaders of the Islamic Revolution, the ideals of an Islamic state were not a return to any recent past. The ideals centered on establishing an Islamic state based on modern concepts—providing security, development, law, democracy, equality, and social morality for an Iranian-Islamic nation. These concepts, which were previously incorporated into the discourses associated with Western modernity, were articulated in terms of the Second Islamic Republic, the first republic being the 13-year reign of the Prophet Mohamad in Medina. Thus, at least for Islamists, this revolution was not a call for establishing an Islamic caliphate so much as for establishing an indigenous-Islamic Republic, which was represented in opposition to Western modernity. For most Iranians in 1979, Western modernity had become associated with domination, colonialism, imperialism, corruptive capitalism, immoral communism, and wicked liberal individualism.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the basic tenets of the Islamic Republic of Iran were modern concepts rather than being particularly Islamic, as Islam had been previously interpreted. It was neither a republic as republicanism had been formerly understood, nor was it Iranian as Iranian-ness had been imagined in the past. This new imagining of Iran was both modern and traditional, and this model of modernity was not yet familiar and imaginable for most in the West and some in Iran.

Many in the West, including the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had not entertained the possibility of an Islamic revolution in Iran. It was not imaginable, conceivable, or predictable to have a revolution with the black flag of Islam instead of the red flag of communism. All the precautionary policies and practices, therefore, had been designed to primarily confront the threat of communism. At the time, Islam—*Shi'ism*, *Wahabism*, or *Sunnism*—was deemed preferable to the evilness of communism.

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 6, Return to Self.

The collapse of the Pahlavi dynasty was all the more shocking because at the time Iran had one of the fastest growing economies in the world. In 1976, Jahangir Amouzegar, Iran's Finance Minister, boasted, "Between 1963 and 1976, the average annual industrial growth exceeded 20 per cent, while the number of industrial plants, and the size of the industrial work force nearly doubled."<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the shah had the loyal backing of one of the strongest military, police, and secret services in the world. Moreover, Iran had the full backing of the United States. In 1977, just a year before the massive intermittent protests began, President Jimmy Carter had confidently characterized Iran as "an island of stability" in a troubled region." The "stability" that Carter referred to was, of course, the stability from the threat of communism—not an Islamic threat.<sup>5</sup> In 1978, as the regime of Mohamad Reza Shah was collapsing, President Carter "took time off from historic Camp David meetings to telephone his support to the embattled Shah."<sup>6</sup> In other words, neither the US officials nor Iran's state-elites expected, imagined, or predicted an Islamic revolution to replace the modern and modernizing regime of the shah of Iran.

Secular intellectuals and political activists did not expect or predict an Islamic revolution in Iran. For the so-called progressive leftist intellectuals around the world, as well as socialists and the secular nationalists in Iran, imagining an Islamic state was not possible either. While they enthusiastically supported the overthrowing of the regime, they dismissed the possibility of an Islamic state. When the Islamic Republic was in fact established, they confidently expected that history would self-correct its own irrationality and the newly Islamic state would be sent back to the dustbin of history. Michel Foucault, who was familiar with Iranian politics of the late 1970s, wrote that "Many here [in the West] and some in Iran are waiting for and hoping for the

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<sup>4</sup> Jahangir Amouzegar, *Iran: An Economic Profile* (Washington: Middle East Institute, 1977), p. x.

<sup>5</sup> James Bill, "Iran and the Crisis of 78," *Foreign Affairs* 57, no. 2 (1978/79).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 334.

moment when secularization will at last come back to the fore and reveal the good, old type of revolution we have always known.”<sup>7</sup>

The question then arises, why did so many people—within and outside of Iran, in and out of government—dismiss the possibility of an Islamic revolution or the establishment of an Islamic state? Could it be that competing ways of imagining Iran had produced competing social realities with different sets of presuppositions, preferences, interests, and mode of rationalities? If so, what was the social content of these competing realities? Most significantly, if competing ways of imagining Self produce competing social realities, how do they shape politics?<sup>8</sup>

These questions are at the heart of my dissertation, and answering them requires a serious surveying of the idea of constructing Iran as a modern nation-state. In this spirit, my dissertation reaches back to texts written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when concepts—development, law, democracy, and equality—then non-existent in the Iranian context began to permeate the language of state-elites and then pervaded the language of the people. I will call these four key political concepts, as well as two existing concepts—security and Islam—the six basic signifiers of modern Iranian political discourses. Consequently, these signifiers, more or less combined, undermined the cohesive imagining of Self; thereby, leading to the emergence of competing “imagined communities.”<sup>9</sup> Each of these imagined communities formed a narrative of Iranian nationalism by incorporating a particular interpretation of the Iranian basic signifiers. I will call these competing narratives “contending political discourses,” and when one is adopted by the state, I

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<sup>7</sup> Lawrence D. Kritzman, ed., *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 224. Foucault was very familiar with the nuances of Iranian politics. He travelled to Iran in 1978 and 1979.

<sup>8</sup> I define “Self” and “Other” as generic collective identities counterpoised to one each other.

<sup>9</sup> For the concept of imagined community, see Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). See Janet Afary, Kevin Anderson, and Michel Foucault, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

will call that particular discourse the “official state discourse” or “state discourse” for short. My research traces the historical narrative of how competing official state discourses emerged in modern Iran. Second, by conducting some textual analysis mixed with historical narrative of political development, the dissertation describes how contending political discourses shaped the idea of building a modern state, the imagination of Iranian nationalism, and the conducting of policies that demarcated the Iranians from “foreigners,” although the meaning of who constituted “Iranians” or “foreigner” changed in time.<sup>10</sup>

### **Literature**

In general, political scientists, sociologists, political economists, and historians, who have studied modern Iran, agree that as a result of Iran’s encounter with the West, fundamental changes occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the centuries-old mode of governance collapsed and a struggle between modernity and tradition began. Generally, the literature assumes that political development and modernization in Iran have failed. Thematically, the main body of the literature treats modernity a Western ideal-typical model whose characteristics should be the political metrics by which the successes or failures of modernity in a non-Western context are measured. In other words, two constant themes pervade the literature. One theme describes Iran’s failure by pointing out its differences with European successes. The other theme attempts to demonstrate the causes of Iran’s failure, and the causes of its failure are always its differences with the West. Therefore, the very act of describing modernity in terms of its differences with Western modernity pre-determines its failure in Iran. In the following section, I will attempt to show how the main body of the literature on political development in Iran describes and causally explains

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<sup>10</sup> Because there were competing ideas as what constituted an “Iranian” or “foreigners,” I put them in quotations.



the failure of modernity and its related concepts from the state, society, and institutional perspectives.

From a state-centric point of view, for example, Nikki Keddie, professor of history at UCLA and an authority on Iranian history, blamed the state for Iran's failure to become modern, democratic, and liberal. She described two contrasting images of Iran: One is "Usually prefaced by the adjective *Persian* . . . [and is] culturally positive . . . [the other is] politically negative."<sup>11</sup> She argued that these contrasting images "however simplified, in some ways reflect real features of Iran's history." She contended that throughout Iran's tumultuous history, Iran displayed two constant characteristics: "the phenomenon of cultural strength combined with problematic politics, particularly on the part of ruling groups."<sup>12</sup> Keddie's reference to the "problematic politics of ruling groups" in Iran would not have been possible had it not been for her ideal typical model of the opposite—the unproblematic politics of Western states. In other words, Keddie stated that despite Iran's cultural heritage and strength, the state has failed to become modern and politically positive as Western states are politically positive. Notwithstanding the problems of assuming a state disembedded from its society and culture, Keddie's reference point for comparing Iran is the West, not the West as a geographical place universally understood, but the West as a fixed, ahistorical, and conceptual ideal that Keddie simply assumes without describing it. In other words, Keddie's reference point for the state failure is a comparative analysis between her fine descriptions of Iran as a failed case of becoming a modern, democratic, and liberal state to a Western ideal type. Keddie was not, however, the only one who compares Iran's failure to modernity with an ideal typical non-existent model for modernity.

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<sup>11</sup> Nikki R. Keddie and Rudolph P. Matthee, *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Richard Cottam surveyed Iranian nationalism from a sociological perspective in the early 1960s. He examined tribes, peasants, minorities, aristocratic elites, and intellectuals as sociological elements of Iranian modern nationalism. Influenced by his Iranian sources and the societal sentiment of the time, he contended that Iranian modern nationalism was deeply scarred by Iran's encounter with Western interventionist, colonialist, and imperialist policies. Then he suggested that the next wave of Iranian nationalism will be more Iranian and less Western.<sup>13</sup> In the same vein, Joseph Upton, who intermittently resided in Iran for 14 years during the late 1940s and 1950s, explained the adverse effects of foreign intervention on the formation of the "Iranian national character," as well as "individual characters."<sup>14</sup> Both Cottam and Upton described Iranian nationalism much in the same way as Kenneth Pollack would describe it some 40 years later. In his 2004 book, *The Persian Puzzle*, Pollack attempted to reveal the complexity of U.S.-Iran relations by examining the historical circumstances that have helped construct what he labeled an Iranian "pathological nationalism." Then he argued that since Iranians have already "mis-learned" their history, it is highly unlikely that the "truth" of history would be revealed to them.<sup>15</sup>

In the literature, Iranian nationalism is characterized as "pathological," "xenophobic," "hyper," and the characterization renders its failure inevitable compared to an ideal typical "healthy" nationalism in Europe. Similarly, James Bill's 1972 book, *The Politics of Iran*:

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<sup>13</sup> Martha L. Cottam and Richard W. Cottam, *Nationalism & Politics: The Political Behavior of Nation States* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1964).

<sup>14</sup> Joseph M. Upton, *The History of Modern Iran; an Interpretation* (Cambridge: Distributed for the Center for Middle Eastern Studies of Harvard University by Harvard University Press, 1960).

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 2004), p. 424.

*Groups, Classes, and Modernism*, pointed out the systematic failing of modernity in Iran.<sup>16</sup>

Unquestionably, an authority on the politics of Iran, Bill focused on the balanced tension and rivalry among the elites as they struggle to maintain the stability of the traditional political system by easing it into a modern system. As in Marvin Zonis's 1971 book, *The Political Elite of Iran*, a large part of Bill's book articulated the pervasive insecurity of the state-elites in all levels of government.<sup>17</sup> Bill and Zonis argued that insecurity is a fixed feature of the Iranian politics. Although ministers were no longer killed as they were during Reza Shah's rule and during the Qajar dynasty, depending on Mohamad Reza Shah's mood of the day, they were dismissed, exiled, demoted, and disgraced.<sup>18</sup> In Bill's estimate, the most serious challenge to the system was what he called "the Uprooters," who consisted mainly of university students, teachers, and professors with leftist and nationalist tendencies.

Meanwhile, the shared theme in Cottam, Zonis, and Bill described the anomalies in the peculiarities of Iranians nationalism, pervasive insecurities among state elites, bureaucratic nepotism, and underdevelopment. As each author described the differences between Iran and the West, the logic of Iran's failure in modernity became self-evident—Iranians looked, acted, and rationalized differently than their Western counterparts, and thus they were not yet modern as the West. Comparing Iran with an ideal typical model of Western modernity, Bill, Zonis, and Cottam failed to understand Iranians in the context of contending discourses in Iran. While they all strongly emphasized Iran's failure in modernity, none noted the increasing power of Islamists or the gap between two social realities—the state and the society.

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<sup>16</sup> James Bill, *The Politics of Iran: Groups, Classes and Modernization*, Merrill Political Science Series (Columbus, Ohio,: Merrill, 1972).

<sup>17</sup> Marvin Zonis, *The Political Elite of Iran*, Princeton Studies on the near East (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 233-341.

<sup>18</sup> Bill, *The Politics of Iran: Groups, Classes and Modernization*, p. 44.

While some have analyzed Iran's failure in modernity by focusing on the state or society, others have examined this presumptive failure by focusing on the various dimensions of characteristics of Iran. Through the prism of formal and informal institutions, the literature examines various aspects of the interdependency between the state and society.<sup>19</sup> One of the most notable scholars in this school, Homa Katouzian, was keenly aware of the Euro-centric perspective of the main body of the literature on Iran. He complained that theories of state and society, produced in the context of the historical experience of European development, were usually applied to "non-European societies" such as Iran:

European analysts took the facts as corresponding to seemingly similar facts from European history; Iranian analysts did not have theories of their own, and what they understood from European theories they applied—more or less uncritically. They saw Iranian land assignees, tribal chieftains and state officials as an aristocracy, merchants as bourgeois, peasants as serfs, and so on. It follows that they also saw the state as the representative of the ruling classes.<sup>20</sup>

To set the Euro-centric view of the Iranian scholarship straight, Katouzian made four points, which are relevant to my argument. First, Katouzian argued that theories must be pertinent and specific to "spatial and temporal varieties."<sup>21</sup> Insisting on contextual instead of universal theories, he proposed the theory of "arbitrary rule," which states that because of the fundamental differences in the interactive relations among the propertied class, the state, and law—the course of political development in Iran has been based on "arbitrary rule" imposed by rulers at state, local, and tribal levels. Katouzian, however, neglected to acknowledge that the

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<sup>19</sup> For a comprehensive literature review of the relationship between state, society, and institutions, see John M. Hobson, *The State and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Also, see Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. 2 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> Homa Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*, Library of Modern Middle East Studies 28 (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2000), p. xii.

<sup>21</sup> In many ways, Katouzian's mythological approach is similar to the argument of Charles Tilly's notion of reading history in its own contextuality. See Charles Tilly, *As Sociology Meets History*, Studies in Social Discontinuity (New York: Academic Press, 1981).

concepts of propertied classes, social bases of state power, and law-based government were deeply embedded in European discourses of modernity.

Moreover, the term, “arbitrary rule” is itself a Euro-centric representation explicitly articulated in Chalres de Secondat Montesquieu’s *The Persian Letters*, Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*, Karl Marx’s writing on India, and Bernard Lewis’s, *The Root of Muslim Rage*. To use a term, such as “arbitrary rule,” which is imbued with the explicit gaze of Orientalists over the Orientals, is incompatible with an Iranian-centered theory.<sup>22</sup> Even as Katouzian wanted to move away from Euro-centric theories, he remained embedded in them ontologically.

Second, Katouzian stated, “Unlike Europe, the state legitimacy was not founded in law and the consent of influential social classes, the mere success of a rebellion was sufficient for its legitimacy.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, his contention is that the legitimacy of rule centered on rulers rather than the rule itself. Then he claimed that the 1906 and 1979 revolutions were departures from the past. The people revolted to change the rule of law. I concur with Katouzian that the 1906 and 1979 revolutions were fundamentally different from all the other historical Iranian rebellions. I also add that for centuries there were no revolutions to change the system of governance. The question then arises, could it be that the reason why rules—arbitrary or not—were not challenged for centuries was that the people indeed understood rules of governance as legitimate? In fact, in most cases, they understood them as divine. Could it be that the reason the so-called arbitrary rule was challenged after Iran’s encounter with the West because the narrative associated with personal rule changed from good to evil? For example, what was previously valued as the “divine rule of the shah of Iran” became associated with previously non-existent

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<sup>22</sup> For a comprehensive review of this claim, see Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran*, Cambridge Cultural Social Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 15-53.

<sup>23</sup> Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*, p. 1.

terms such as “despotic orientalism,” “arbitrary rule,” “illegitimate rule,” and “unrepresentative rule.” These are categorical identifications explicitly constructed in reference to an ideal typical Western model. These categories are descriptive representations of the East. Is legitimacy only “founded in law and the consent of influential social classes,” as it had been in Europe?

Third, Katouzian described the modern and pre-modern history of Iran in terms of the theory of “arbitrary rule.” The theory has a cyclical trajectory, which is very deterministic. He explained each cycle in four terms: (a) the implosion of the system because of arbitrary rule; (b) the establishment of relative freedom; (c) freedom leading to social chaos and physical insecurity; and (d) a strongman coming to power to provide security and peace. This cyclical theory, he argued, leads to the reestablishment of another round of arbitrary rule. Referring to the establishment of Reza Shah and the Islamic Republic, he stated that “after some temporary successes [for having freedom and law] . . . the Iranian society proved to be more powerful than newly acquired political ideas.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, for Katouzian, not only is modernity a fixed ideal typical concept, but tradition is also a fixed and deterministic concept. Moreover, both the state and the society deterministically provide the condition for justification of a cyclical theory of the “arbitrary rule.”

Finally, Katouzian presented his methodological approach by declaring:

[T]his research [is] . . . a comparative theory of Iranian state, society and politics developed by applying social science models and techniques to Iranian society. It compares and contrasts the Iranian experience with that of Europe, laying bare the important—but often concealed differences between them.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, he explicitly accepted Europe as an ideal typical model of modernity. That is why he described Reza Shah’s attempt to modernize as “pseudo modernism.” Presumably,

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

“pseudo modernism” is counterposed to “real modernism,” which is assumed to be a universal model that has never existed except in the interpretation of philosophers in the past, and now in the understanding of political scientists.<sup>26</sup> The central problem with the main body of the literature on Iran is not, therefore, the misapplication of Euro-centric theories, but rather the ontological assumption that modernity has to mimic an ideal typical Western model to be “real.” Essentially, Katouzian’s description of Iran is a self-fulfilling failure so far as Iran is compared with a Western ideal typical model.

Other contemporary scholars of Iranian political development share Katouzian’s ontological assumptions. The titles of widely published books, whose authors are greatly respected in Iranian academia, reveal the prevailing ontological assumption that views Iran as a case of failed modernity. For example, Hussein Bashiriye’s book, *Obstacles to Political Development in Iran (Mavanea Tosa’yea Syasi dar Iran)* is a survey of the causes of Iran’s underdevelopment. Again, an ideal typical model of the present serves to measure the failure of modernity in Iran, which is presumably caused by its historical conditions.

Another eminent Iranian scholar is Kazem Alamdari, whose book *Why Iran Lagged Behind and the West Moved Forward* has been republished at least 10 times since 2000.<sup>27</sup> Alamdari contended that the causes for Iran’s lagging behind the West were the absence of capitalism and secularism. He stated that development in Western countries was caused by “capitalism and secularism, neither one of which exists in today’s Iran.”<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Ahmad

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<sup>26</sup> For example, see Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (London,: Penguin, 1967).

<sup>27</sup> The 10<sup>th</sup> edition of this was reprinted in 2004. In Iran, academic books are normally printed only in batches of 3,000, and it is unusual for a book to be reprinted that many times. See Kazam Alamdari, *Why Iran Lagged Behind and the West Moved Forward* 10<sup>th</sup> ed., vol. 1 (Tejram: Shabak, 1990).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

Movassaghi, who currently teaches in the Department of Law and Political Science at the University of Tehran, published *Modernization and Reform in Iran: From Theory and Practice*.<sup>29</sup> Movassaghi continued the theme of the main body of literature. In his description of the West, Western modernity is a measuring rod for comparing Iran's development. The questions for his research include:

What are the theories, rules, and anomalies of Western modernity with all of its associative social concepts, which have all originated in the West based on Western historical experiences? How were they introduced to the Third World? The hypothetical answer to these questions rests on the fact that modernism and reform in the West developed within the framework of modernity, which included gradual cultural, social, economic, and political transformation. But in the Third World and Iran, these transformations have been ideological, superficial, incomplete, in name, and unrealistic. . . . We will attempt to distinguish the differences between real modernism and the pseudo modernism that have been introduced and enforced in Iran.<sup>30</sup>

Notwithstanding the differences in the perspectives of the contributors to this body of literature, it appears as if the 1960s to 1970s generation, as well as the 1990s to 2000 generation of scholars—whether writing in or outside of Iran—have all been trained in the same political science department.

In sum, the main body of the literature on Iran produced by the previous and current generation of scholars of Iran treats both modernity and tradition as fixed ideal types placed on a linear continuum. On this continuum, modernity is either valued as an inevitable evolutionary historical path led by the West or is devalued as a devolutionary historical course imposed by the West. In either case, history is treated as a determining institution that produces its own deterministic concepts and questions. However, the question of how individuals come to define,

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<sup>29</sup> Ahmad Movassaghi, *Modernization and Reform in Iran: From Theory to Practice* (Tehran: Ghoomes Publishing Company 1385/1996). In Western-based texts, a clear distinction exists between modernization and modernity. In Iranian texts, this distinction is sometimes blurred. Movassaghi's book title is an example. By modernization, he means modernity (*nu sazi*).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.



describe, and interpret concepts is not asked. The main body of the literature on Iran, therefore, remains silent as to changes and transformations that have occurred in meanings of concepts associated with modernity and traditional. The dissertation refrains from categorizing political development into modernity and tradition. It attempts to describe the emergence, as well as the changes and transformation in the meaning of how the state elites interpreted concepts, themes, practices, rationalities associated with political development in Iran's modern history. The dissertation adheres to an interpretative approach that takes changes and transformations in the meanings of concepts, themes, and rationalities seriously.

### **Interpretative Approach**

In contrast to the extant literature, this dissertation is inspired by the “reflexive” or “interpretative” approach, which takes intersubjective meanings seriously. According to Ido Oren, “The term ‘reflexivity’ derives from the Latin word *reflexus*—‘bent backward’—and in social theory it generally refers to the turning of science back upon itself.”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Charles Taylor argues that the study of man is essentially the science of interpretation. He asks, “Is there a sense in which interpretation is essential to explanation in the sciences of man? The view that it is, that there is an unavoidably ‘hermeneutical’ component in the sciences of man, goes back to Dilthy.”<sup>32</sup> Taylor contends:

Interpretation, in the sense relevant to hermeneutics, is an attempt to make clear, to make sense of an object of study. This object must, therefore, be a text, or text-analogue, which in some way is confused, incomplete, cloudy, seemingly contradictory—in one way or

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<sup>31</sup> Ido Oren, "Political Science as History: A Reflexive Approach," in *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn* ed. Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea (Armonk, New York ME Sharpe 2006), p. 221.

<sup>32</sup> Charles Taylor, "Neutrality in Political Science," in *Philosophy and Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 25.

another, unclear. The interpretation aims to bring to light an underlying coherence or sense.<sup>33</sup>

To clarify what is otherwise unclear, Taylor points out to the centrality of meanings in the interpretation of Self, things, and Others. He states:

(1) Meaning is for a subject. a specific subject. a group of subjects . . . (2) Meaning is of something: that is. We can distinguish between a given element—situation. action. Or whatever—and its meaning. . . . And (3) things only have meaning in a field, that is, in relation to the meanings of other things. This means that there is no such thing as a single, unrelated meaningful element; and it means that changes in the other meanings in the field can involve changes in the given element.<sup>34</sup>

Taylor claims that his definition of “meanings” of social reality, which he calls “experiential meaning . . . is for a subject. of something. in a field [fragmented sentence in original].”<sup>35</sup> He makes a distinction between “Linguistic meaning which has a four- and not a three-dimensional structure. Linguistic meaning is for subjects and in a field, but it is the meaning of signifiers and it is about a world of referents [signified].”<sup>36</sup> In this dissertation, I follow Taylor’s methodology, which focuses on the linguistic meanings of signifiers.

For the purpose of this dissertation, I am concerned with four interrelated characteristics of Taylor’s interpretative approach. First, Taylor criticizes the mainstream literature for not understanding “the science of man.” For example, Taylor argues, “Ignoring the differences in the intersubjective meanings can be disastrous to the science of comparative politics, namely, that we interpret all other societies in the categories of our own.”<sup>37</sup> I argue that the main body of literature on Iran has failed to explain the changing meaning of key words, such as development,

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 32-33.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

security, and law because it has applied conceptual categories constructed in the West to describe Iran's competing social realities. Second, Taylor focuses on "meanings" as social phenomena that are intersubjectively interpreted as "reality" for subjects, of things in particular fields, and in relations to other words, things, concepts, images, and narratives. Taylor emphasizes that social reality is an interpretation of Self as a group, of the material and social world, and of the intersubjective vision in relational terms, for example, Self in relation to others. The third characteristic of Taylor is his attention to transformative changes:

My principal claim is that we can only come to grip with this phenomenon of breakdown [transformative changes] by trying to understand more clearly and profoundly the common and intersubjective meanings of the society in which we have been living. For it is there which no longer hold us, and to understand this change we have to have an adequate grasp of these meanings. But this we cannot do as long as we remain with the ambit of mainstream social science, for it will not recognize intersubjective meanings, and is forced to look at the central ones of our society as though they were the inescapable background for all political actions.<sup>38</sup>

For Taylor, historical changes in "common meanings or intersubjectivity" transform social reality. Accordingly, social reality is embedded in the knowledge of the present but built upon the past, as they were understood. Citing the case of immigrant groups—embedded in two contrasting social realities of their past and present, he states that new identities are "sealed in the blood of the old."<sup>39</sup>

Finally, the fourth characteristic of Taylor's interpretative approach is to show that competing social realities can and do coexist. Taylor strongly rejects the notion that politics is about the "perennial" struggle of making distinction between, for example, the "correct political perception" and its opposite—"ideological," "misperception," "irrationality," "false

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

consciousness,” “traditional,” and so forth.<sup>40</sup> For Taylor, there are competing interpretations of social reality—intertwined yet distinct from one another. For example, he writes that “the common meaning of “the American Way, or freedom as understood in the U.S.A. . . . is differently articulated by different groups. This is the basis of the bitterest fights in a society.”<sup>41</sup> On the one hand, what is expressed, for example, as ‘the American Way’ is closely interwoven in the common meanings of different groups living in the United States. On the other hand, each group might intersubjectively interpret “the American Way” differently. In short, Taylor argues that humans interpret Self, things, and Others as they construct competing social realities embedded in the particularity of their intersubjectivity.

Inspired by Taylor’s interpretative approach, I also argue that conceptual changes are inevitable, as changes in “meanings” constitute transformations in concepts, theories, ideologies, and rationalities. My dissertation, therefore, takes the changing nature of social meanings seriously. The dissertation attempts to trace changes at the surface, as well as transformative or interruptive changes in the meanings of key political concepts in the history of modern Iran. On the one hand, the success of the endeavor to clarify what has been ambiguously described depends on demonstrating how meanings of key political concepts in Iran’s modern history have indeed changed in time.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, the success depends upon showing how competing interpretations of Self, things, and Others in relational terms constituted competing social realities. I aim to trace the contending meanings embedded in competing political images of Iran’s modern history.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 55-60.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>42</sup> Later in this section, I will explain that by key political concept, I mean what Foucault names “governing statements.”

In the same vein, the empirical survey of Ido Oren's book, *Our Enemies and US: America's Rivalries and the Making of Political Science* (2003), succeeds in tracing competing meanings of social reality by tracing changes in how American political scientists interpreted Self, things, and Others. Summarizing how American political scientists interpreted Imperial Germany, Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and Stalin's Soviet Union—before and after wars with the United States—Oren states that:

[T]he current images of Imperial Germany, Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and Stalin's Soviet Union in American political science differ markedly from those presented before the regimes became America's enemies. Imperial Germany was transformed from a progressive constitutional state into a reactionary "autocracy"; Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and Stalin's Soviet Union metamorphosed from legitimate laboratories of social or administrative experimentation into embodiments of "totalitarian" evil.<sup>43</sup>

Oren demonstrates a particular pattern in the field of American political science. Despite the claim to scientific neutrality, American political scientists closely mirrored official state policies, practices, and ideologies because they were unconsciously embedded in the social reality of their time.<sup>44</sup> Oren explains his methodological affinity.<sup>45</sup> Quoting Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 36), he contends, "The primary target [of reflexive analysis] is not the

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<sup>43</sup> Ido Oren, *Our Enemies and Us: America's Rivalries and the Making of Political Science* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 9.

<sup>44</sup> The mainstream approach in political science often emphasizes the importance of the individual to establish, produce, and reproduce the belief system of the actor. For example, see Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (Oxford, England; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 74. The literature is, however, ambiguous as to the genesis of concepts, themes, logics, choices, conceptual structures and does not explain changes, transformations, and interruptions in the meanings, such as democracy, security, class analysis, development, liberalism, governance, and so forth. One of the reasons the positivist literature focuses on individuals, individualizes groups, or constructs structural analyses structure is methodological expediency. See Richard Little and Steve Smith, *Belief Systems and International Relations* (Oxford, UK; New York, NY: B. Blackwell in association with the British International Studies Association, 1988), p. 17. In the words of Steve Smith, "The central claim [is] that positivism's importance has not been . . . that it has given international theory a method, but that its empiricist epistemology has determined what could be studied because it has determined what kinds of things existed in international relations." See Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski, eds., *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 11.

<sup>45</sup> Oren, "Political Science as History: A Reflexive Approach."

individual analyst but the *social and intellectual unconscious* embedded in analytic tools and categories.”<sup>46</sup> Focusing on how presupposition unconsciously built into concepts, themes, strategic choices, logic of arguments, and instruments of analysis, Oren aims to clarify the changing meaning of “democracy” in “the democratic peace literature.”<sup>47</sup>

In his hermeneutic approach, Oren applies the four thematic characteristics of Taylor’s interpretative approach: (a) He criticizes mainstream political science for ignoring the changing meaning of political concepts; (b) he considers “meanings” constitutive of social reality; (c) he shows that changes in social context transform the social content of political concepts, such as “democracy;” and (d) he illustrates that there are competing social realities in time and space, each with a particular interpretation of what Taylor calls the “correct political perception,” which is unconsciously counterpoised to “misperceptions,” “irrational,” “ideological,” “traditional,” and so forth.

In short, Taylor’s interpretative approach presumes that humans are self-interpreting subjects embedded in their own intersubjective socio-ethico-historical world of reality. Taylor calls this intersubjective reality “experiential reality,” which, he claims, is always understood in relational terms. As Taylor puts it, “The meaning of a word depends, for instance, on those words with which it contrasts, on those which defines its place in the language (e.g., those defining ‘determinable’ dimensions, like color, shape).”<sup>48</sup> For example, a particular shade of “gray” color is understood only in terms of its degree of “equivalence and difference” or

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid; brackets in original.

<sup>47</sup> Oren, “Political Science as History: A Reflexive Approach.”

<sup>48</sup> Taylor, “Neutrality in Political Science,” p. 33.

“linkages and differences” to “black” and “white” colors.<sup>49</sup> It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that an interpretative inquiry attempts to discover how words, images, myths, and narratives of experiences are identified in terms of their relational linkages and differences expressed in the language. The language, therefore, becomes the medium that mirrors, reflect, or constitute the changing nature of social reality. Also, it is reasonable to assume that language is the medium that represents the existential realities throughout time, so it is constitutive of not only social reality but also changing social reality.

The interpretative focus of this dissertation is the language of the state-elites in Iran, so I adhere to the view of Michel Foucault whose commitment to interpretative epistemology based on language stands out among contemporary social theorists. The primary focus of Foucault’s interpretation is not only the general language (*langage*) as the medium of social communication but also the particularity of languages as the medium for competing discourses mirroring competing experiences of social reality.<sup>50</sup>

For Foucault, on the one hand, language (*langue*) is a semantic field of shared meanings that make communication possible via highly structured sign systems—French, English, German, and so forth. On the other hand, languages (*langages*) are particular fields of shared knowledge that constitute a particular understanding of social reality—economics, medicine, psychotherapy—which he calls a discourse.

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<sup>49</sup> For an informative explanation of the logic of “equivalence and difference,” see Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985). For the application of the logic of “linkages and differences,” see Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>50</sup> Foucault’s works can be divided into at least two phases—early and late works. The first phase of Foucault, reflected in the 1972 *Archaeology of Knowledge*, focuses on the role of discourses. In his *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault proposes his theoretical framework for the exploration of the concept of discourses. This dissertation draws upon some elements of Foucault’s archaeological works. For more information, see Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault, Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). The second phase, reflected in his genealogical works places emphasis on institutional practices rather than the autonomy of discourses.

Foucault defines a discourse “as the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation” in the common language interwoven with other related systems of discursive formations.<sup>51</sup> In some ways, Foucault’s interpretation of the distinction between common language (*langue*) and particular languages (*langages*) or discourses is similar to how Taylor defines the intertwining relationship between “common meanings” in the language and “intersubjective meanings” shared by particular groups communicating in a common language. The distinction is between the common language and the particular understanding of discourses, for example, in “economics,” “natural history,” “psychology,” and “sociology.” As the discourse of “economics,” for instance, is a “regime of truth and knowledge” for a particular group of experts, and it is articulated in terms of shared understanding of presuppositions that frame its concepts, themes, and rationalities, and so is the official political discourse of a state in a given period. In this dissertation, I refer to that particular language or discourse of the state-elites as the state political discourses.

For Foucault, unlike the property of the natural language (*langue*), which is ahistorical, discourses are essentially historical and can be analyzed within the time in which they occurred.<sup>52</sup> A discourse is a particular language [*langage*] of power, authority, position, knowledge, and relations. Foucault contends that “the language of our knowledge,” at any given time and space, is the structure “that enables us to analyze so many other *languages* [discourses], that language which, in its historical density, we regard as irreducible.”<sup>53</sup> According to Foucault, “It is on the basis of that language, with its slow genesis, and the obscure development that has brought us to the present state, that we can speak of other discourses in terms of structures.” In

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<sup>51</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989[1972]), p. 107.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 201.



Foucault's words, "[I]t is that language which has given us the possibility and the right to do so. . . [those particular languages] forms the blind spot on the basis of which things around us are arranged as we see them today."<sup>54</sup>

In sum, Foucault defines discourses as "a group of statements . . . made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined."<sup>55</sup> The assumption is that language is an active medium and itself a part of how social reality is collectively constructed and intersubjectively understood.<sup>56</sup> Foucault argues that discourses create conditions of possibility for the production of presuppositions, truths, preferences, interests, rationalities, and contextual knowledge that creates a space in the language for what would be possible, communicable, and socially valued or devalued.<sup>57</sup>

For the purpose of this dissertation, which is concerned with the Iranian state- elites' imagination of an ideal nation-state, I will attempt to interpret the language of the official state discourses in modern Iran. I will analyze the "slow genesis" and "obscure development" of contending discourses of the state-elites as the way they projected their "discursive practices "onto the society," which produced, reproduced, and reified conditions of possibility for the construction of the political discourse of Islamic Republicanism.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>56</sup> To my knowledge, Foucault does not use the term "intersubjectivity" in *Archaeology of Knowledge*. I use it because the term has become a generic word that refers to collective, unconscious, and subjective meanings shared by groups of people.

<sup>57</sup> For the purpose of this dissertation, I mention Foucault for his insight into the role of discourses and the hierarchic formation of historical discourses into condition of existence. I am aware that there are methodological and epistemological differences between Taylor and Foucault. While Taylor's emphasis is hermeneutics and interpretative meanings, Foucault's focus is the opposite. He attempts to avoid all interpretation and departs from the goals of hermeneutics and "truth" in meanings. But this does not mean that Foucault denounces interpretative meaning. For him, meanings depend on the historical discursive formations. For the purpose of this dissertation, I mention Foucault for his insight into the role of discourses and the hierarchic formation of discourses.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 117. By discursive practice, Foucault means the way in which discourses are projected onto society.

Foucault argues that within a discourse, there are “interior hierarchies” which are organized based on “governing statements.”<sup>59</sup> Depending upon the existential conditions of possibilities within a given discourse, “governing statements” maintain regularities in concepts, themes, and rationalities. They also allow for the alteration of “the most discrete or the most banal” rules within discourses.<sup>60</sup> As with the hierarchic relation between “a tree and its roots, trunk, and branches,” concepts, themes, and rationalities embedded in a given discourse are linked together in a series of hierarchical relations. At the root of this hierarchy are *governing statements* that govern and “reveal the most general and most widely applicable form.”<sup>61</sup> Accordingly, these governing statements become the starting point for how other objects, concepts, rationalities, and “strategic choices” or mode of rationality may be formed.<sup>62</sup> At the ends of the branches or trunk of this metaphorical tree, a group of statements “are less general and whose domain of applications are more concrete.”<sup>63</sup> To illustrate the “interior hierarchy” of discourses, Foucault mentions the discourse of “Natural History” as an example. He contends that the governing statement of the discourse of natural history defines the general condition of possibility, but other group of statements describes discoveries, techniques, organizational principles, and categorical classification in ways that are more concrete.<sup>64</sup> In Foucault’s metaphorical “tree” of interwoven discourses, the whole shapes the meanings of its parts, and “governing statements” shape, subordinate, and permeate the meanings of other concepts,

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<sup>59</sup> Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 146.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

themes, and rationalities embedded in subordinated discourses. Accordingly, in a series of relational linkages and differences, a basic signifier forms hierarchic relational linkages with other subordinated signifiers. A particular formation of this tree-like, hierarchic combination of a basic signifier with other signifiers constitute the formation of a discourse.

The importance of Foucault's theoretical contribution is that discourses are hierarchic structures. At the highest level of abstraction, discourses provide the framework for the formation of intersubjectivity, concepts, themes, and mode of rationality by providing a particular condition of conceivability that shape what is imaginable, desirable, possible or impossible. At lower levels of abstraction, discourses and their related subordinated discourses provide the condition for adaptation and change. Discourses incorporate and adapt to concrete changes at social levels.<sup>65</sup> However, changes at lower levels of abstraction do not necessarily change the meaning of "governing statements." For example, changes from liberal to socialist economic policies do not necessarily change the discourse of development, whose governing statement is related to a series of words, images, myths, and narratives that value "progress," "economic development," "modernization," and so forth. In short, Foucault's metaphor of "tree" as a hierarchic conceptual structure is a way of demonstrating both "regularities" at structural levels but also openness or "flexibilities" at the level of subordinated or sub-discourses discourses.

The hierarchic characteristic of discourses is relevant in analyzing Iran's contending political discourses for two interrelated reasons. First, discovering the hierarchic formation of political discourses requires the identification of "governing statements" of a given discourse. Given that "governing statements" consist of a combination of words, the task is to identify the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 145-148.

signifying word of a given “governing statement.” I call the signifying word of a “governing statement” its “basic signifier.” For the purpose of this dissertation, I consider a “basic signifier” as the most central element of a “governing statement” in a discourse.<sup>66</sup> My historical examination will reveal that as the result of Iran’s encounter with the West, four new basic signifiers entered into the political language. These basic signifiers were development, law, people, and class. These four basic signifiers plus two traditional signifiers—security and Islam—have given meanings to the contending political discourses throughout Iran’s modern history.

Related to the hierarchical formation of a basic signifier is the concept of “hegemony.” Antonio Gramsci describes “hegemony” as a hegemonic formation--“bloc”—in which a particular understanding of economic, social, cultural, and historical forces have converged to form a particular understanding of social, historical, and material reality. Accordingly, the convergence of these forces creates a fluid understanding among the masses, which Gramsci calls a “hegemonic block” within which “national politics” takes place.<sup>67</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe invert Gramsci’s interpretation of “hegemony” on its head. They argue:

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<sup>66</sup> I am aware that mentioning basic signifiers might make Foucault only of secondary importance. As a point of clarification, I am following some elements of Foucault’s concepts such as hierarchies, and discourses.

My definition of “basic signifiers” is influenced by Ernesto Laclau’s concept of “empty signifiers,” which he describes as “the conceptual construction of universalizing what is essentially a particular identity, which is void of its own social content, and is recognized only in terms of other words, images, demands, and practices.” See Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London; New York: Verso, 2005), pp. 71-76. According to Laclau, an empty signifier is the sign or the label without which we cannot recognize conceptual construct, such as populist, democracy, Islam, Christianity, socialism, liberalism, and so forth. They are the linguistic necessities “for unifying a multiplicity of heterogeneous demands in equivalencies chains.” See Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, p. 154. In other words, to create a singular image out of the inherently competing meanings, for example, of a nation, or of a particular religion, we need “empty signifiers.” Just as a container might be solely identified by its label on the outside, so does an empty signifier that identifies Self as, for example, Iranians, Muslims, intellectuals and other inherently heterogeneous groups as one. A Self, which is primarily identified by a sign, but is inherently divided inside.

<sup>67</sup> For the concept of hegemonic bloc, see Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 151.

For Gramsci, even though the diverse social elements have a merely relational identity—achieved thorough articulatory practices—there must always be a *single* unifying principle in every hegemonic formation, and this can only be a fundamental class. . . . [and] this is the inner essentialist core which continues to be present in Gramsci's thought.”<sup>68</sup>

,” In this dissertation, I refer to “hegemonic bloc” or “historical bloc” as the convergence of consensus

Second, analyzing changes in political discourses means the examination, exposition, and exfoliation of the hierarchic formation of signifiers embedded in them. On the one hand and at the highest level of abstraction, if basic signifiers are identified, then the general rules and principles for the conditions of possibilities for providing presuppositions, truth, and preferences are also identified. Relatedly, the framework for the formation of “regularities” embedded in concepts, themes, and mode of rationalities can be recognized. On the other hand, if the hierarchic relations between basic signifiers and other signifiers are identified, the “flexibilities” at concrete levels of a given discourse can also be analyzed.

From this analytical perspective, the examination of texts can reveal the distinction between general principles that basic signifiers govern, but also concrete practices that other (subordinated) signifiers govern. While the basic signifiers create regularity for a given period, subordinating signifiers are open to changes. The identification of the hierarchy in a given discourse also reveals the pattern in which words, concepts, and narratives are valued or devalued, privileged or muted, pleasant or offensive, and imaginable or not. For example, if “security” is the basic signifier in a given discourse, then “security” frames the meanings of all other signifiers intertwined in a given discourse. If a discourse privileges “security” over “development,” a general discursive practice in the case of Iraq would articulate as follows: “We must establish security in Iraq first before we attempt to begin the process of ‘development’.” On

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<sup>68</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*.

the other hand, if a given discourse privileges “development” over “security,” a corresponding representation would contend: “We must ‘developed’ Iraq in order to ‘secure’ it.”

In short, drawing upon elements of Foucault’s articulation of discourses, this dissertation will trace the historical rise and collapse of the official state discourses and their hierarchic formations in Iran’s modern history. It will argue that depending on the hierarchic formation of the basic signifiers, which are embedded in key concepts or governing statements, the Iranian state-elites had competing images of an ideal nation-state. It will further discuss how competing official state discourses constituted the power and knowledge for producing a particular ideal type nation-state that devalued and muted other contending imaginations of Iran.

To sum up, in this section, I have criticized the main body of the literature on Iran for treating concepts, themes, and rationalities related to modernity and traditional as fixed and immutable ideal typical models in opposition to each other. I have captured the criticism of mainstream political science for ignoring the changing meaning of political concepts articulated by Charles Taylor, who argued that “meanings” are constitutive of social reality. Following Taylor’s contention, I mentioned that changes in social context transform the social content of political concepts, such as “democracy” as was illustrated by Oren’s empirical survey of history of political science in the United States. Moreover, I cited theoretical arguments for the coexistence of competing social realities in time and space, each with a particular interpretation of social reality. Taylor argued that these competing social realities are usually represented in binary oppositions between “correct political perceptions” and “misperceptions,” “irrational,” “ideological,” “traditional,” and so forth. To make sense of this inherent and dominant feature in expressions of meanings, Taylor argued, “The meaning of a word depends, for instance, on those words with which it contrasts, on those which defines its place in the language (e.g., those

defining ‘determinable’ dimensions, like color, shape).”<sup>69</sup> In other words, social reality understood in terms of signs or words in the natural language (English, French, German, etc.) imposes structural constraint on the social understanding of reality. That is, signs in a language, which represent social reality, are differentiated from each other in terms of their relational linkages and differences. Changes in the meaning of language, therefore, become the medium that mirrors or represents competing social realities with a shifting and contradictory understanding of intersubjectivities, concepts, themes, and mode of rationalities.

This characteristic of language brought me to Foucault’s archaeological works, which made a distinction between language (*langue*) as a semantic field and discourses as the competing languages (*langage*) of power and knowledge. Foucault described discourses as “a group of statements” that provide conditions of possibility for the production of presuppositions, truths, preferences, interests, rationalities, and contextual knowledge expressed in the language.<sup>70</sup> He further argued that discourses have “interior hierarchies,” which are organized based on their respective “governing statements” in their relational linkages with other sub-discourses. I have argued that basic signifiers, in turn, govern the conceptualization of governing statements. Finally, I argue that Foucault’s concepts of the hierarchic formation of discourses and the “governing statements” of particular discourses provides the analytical tool for identifying basic signifiers in their relational linkages and differences with other signifiers. More importantly, the hierarchic formation among basic signifiers and other signifiers allow accounting for “regularities” and “flexibility” within a given discourse, as well as transformations and changes. Tracing the historical changes and transformations in contending political discourses in Iran,

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<sup>69</sup> Taylor, "Neutrality in Political Science," p. 33.

<sup>70</sup> Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 117.

therefore, can shed some light on how the Iranian state elites had different intersubjective imaginations of an ideal nation-state in Iran.

### **Challenges and Issues**

The conduct of this research raised three interrelated challenges. First, how do I identify the official state discourses, their corresponding basic signifiers, and their respective hierarchic formations in their relational linkages, differences, and oppositions? Second, how do I identify the source materials? Third, how do I provide the necessary historical context for my analysis of the contending discourses in Iran's modern history?

First, to identify the official state discourses, I needed to identify their governing statements based on the identification of their basic signifiers. I, therefore, conducted an extensive research in pre-modern texts as well as modern ones. With an interpretative theoretical mindset and a Foucaultian understanding of discourses, I read these texts for identifying recurring voices of subjects, themes, concepts, and modes of rationality that constituted meanings, policies, and practices in politics. In my analysis of pre-modern texts, I identified two basic signifiers, Islam and security, which constituted the official state discourse. The two signifiers provided the conditions of possibility for governing Iran rather cohesively for centuries without fundamental changes in the pattern of governance.

The careful examination of texts produced after the 1870s, however, revealed that four more signifiers had entered into the language: law, development, people, and class. By the early 1900s, the four modern signifiers, along with the two traditional signifiers, showed up in all political texts, each attached to a different set of meanings in terms of a "tree" like formation of security, development, law, democracy or people, class, and Islam. I have called these sets of meanings the contending political discourses, each with a different imagination of an ideal nation-state.



To analyze how each political discourse interpreted its relation to Self, things in a field, and Others, I first had to identify the basic signifiers that governed the “regularity” in the discourse, as well as identifying the hierarchic relation between a basic signifier and other signifiers. In finding the basic signifier of a particular discourse and its hierarchic relational linkages and differences to other signifiers, I could examine what were valued or devalued, privileged or muted, idealized or demonized, considered Self or Others, and constituted Iranian or Foreign. Moreover, I could examine the conceptualization of what were considered security, development, lawfulness, democracy or people, Islamic, and class just counterpoised to their opposites. In doing so, I could draw a narrative of how different official state discourses idealized contending images of state-building, nation imagining, and conducting of foreign policy.

The second challenge was selection and reading of texts and text-analogues. The selection of source material was relatively easy and conventional. Identifying contending political discourses included texts that speak from the position of “truth” and “authority,” for example, policy statements, partisan newspapers and journals, speeches, debates, official records, party platforms, and written and oral memories. In the case of oral memories, the audio collection titled *Oral History at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies* at Harvard University was a very useful source. I also selected texts produced by non-state actors, for example, newspapers, historical books, fictions, films, poetry, comics, songs, anthems. I have cited some of these source materials throughout this dissertation, but not all.

The criterion for reading texts was a difficult task because the criterion could not be predetermined. For identifying the “basic signifiers,” analyzing the relational linkages and differences among them, and finding their hierarchic formations, I needed historical texts and

texts-analogues to compare “regularities” and “flexibilities” within contending discourses, as well as finding interruptions and transformations among discourses. But I did not know which signifiers or what hierarchic formations I should be looking for in reading of the texts. The only knowable criterion for the reading of texts, at first, was an attempt based on the principle of reading contending viewpoints expressed in texts and text-analogues. Questions about which signifiers existed or what hierarchic formations they had only came along gradually. In other words, rather than having a set of questions first and then looking for the appropriate answers, the questions and answers of which signifiers and what formations came together. The answers and questions came together through a long and careful reading of texts.

As Ido Oren argues, “The endeavor to answer research questions based on a close reading of texts is essentially an exercise in hermeneutic interpretation,” which is an attempt “to make sense of” what is otherwise unclear.<sup>71</sup> In this spirit, my first reading of texts looked for contending viewpoints expressed in texts and text-analogues. I identified basic signifiers and their hierarchic formation, and then the phase of narration and analysis began. In short, the criterion for reading texts was a process-oriented, subjective, and interpretative attempt to look for contrasting and contending visions expressed in text and text-analogues. Once the basic signifiers and their hierarchic formations were identified and conceptualized, then the focus of the research shifted on to the critical events, interruptions, and transformations in the political history of Iran.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Oren, “Political Science as History: A Reflexive Approach,” p. 224.

<sup>72</sup> I have focused on texts written during and about the Tobacco Uprising, the 1906 Constitutional Revolution, World War I, the British 1919 Agreement, the 1921 British-backed military coup, the 1926 establishment of Pahlavi Dynasty, the 1927-1933 politicization of dress codes, the 1941 Allied invasion, the rise and fall of Mussadiq, the 1953 coup, the 1961 rebellion, the 1963-1964 land reform, and finally the consolidation and collapse of Mohamad Reza Shah in 1979. Throughout this dissertation, I cite some of these events.

The third challenge for this interpretative inquiry was how to balance between a description of historical events and the analysis of concurrent political discourses. On the one hand, the attempt to analyze contending discourses without describing the context in which they occurred would have been an analysis void of context. On the other hand, the approach to describe without analyzing would have been a historical description void of analysis. My solution to the balancing of these two criteria was to do both. However, because it was important for me to describe the emergence of contending political discourses, I paid more attention to the making a narrative of the emergence of political discourses than deep textual analysis, especially in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. In my description of the emergence of contending discourse, I used the concept of “hegemony” to describe political spaces in which the differences in contending discourses were pushed to the background, and they united around a particular basic signifier.<sup>73</sup>

The balancing between describing and analyzing allowed me to explain how the state-elites understood themselves. Beginning with the state-elites encountering and embracing the West in the 1800s, and ending with a majority of the elites and the people confronting and rejecting the West in 1979, I make a historical narrative that show the emergence of contending discourses in Iran. In this narrative, as I trace, describe, and analyze the contrasting viewpoints of the state-

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<sup>73</sup> Gramsci describes “hegemony” as a “historic or ideological bloc” For Gramsci, a hegemonic formation is the convergence of consensus about understanding of social, cultural, economic, and historical reality. Accordingly, the convergence of these forces creates a fluid understanding among the masses, which Gramsci calls a “hegemonic, historic, or ideological bloc” within which “national politics” takes place. See, Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 151. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe invert Gramsci’s interpretation of “hegemony” on its head. They argue, “For Gramsci, even though the diverse social elements have a merely relational identity—achieved through articulatory practices—there must always be a single unifying principle in every hegemonic formation, and this can only be a fundamental class. . . . [and] this is the inner essentialist core which continues to be present in Gramsci’s thought” (Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, p. 69.) In addition to departing from Gramsci’s class-based analysis, Laclau and Mouffe argue that a hegemonic formation is a temporary conjectural political space without a center (p. 36-37). They argue that a hegemonic formation is a political space in which “the conditions and the possibility of pure fixing of differences recede; every social identity becomes the meeting point for a multiplicity of articulatory practices, many of them antagonistic” (p. 137-138).

elites in Iran's modern history from 1926 to 1979. This narration and analysis will show that the categorization of modernity versus tradition has little analytical value because it arbitrarily places concepts, themes, and rationalities associated with competing social realities ideal type conceptualization of modernity and tradition. I contend that after Iran's encountered the West, the state elites's interpretation of social reality changed, so did their policies and practices. I argue that those policies and practices could not be attributed to historical mistakes, misunderstandings, flawed ideology, or false consciousness. Neither could they be attributed to misunderstanding of modernity or tradition. They were, instead, competing interpretations social reality reflected in contending political discourses in Iran. I contend that without understanding the contending political discourses, describing and analyzing Iran's modern political development that resulted in the establishment of the Islamic Islamic Republic would be difficult, if not, an impossible task.

I summarized this section by way of an example. In the 1920s, Hassan Taqi-zadeh, reflecting the dominant thinking of the time, admired the West and Western modernity as the model to be emulated. He wrote:

First, the adoption and promotion, without condition or reservation, of European civilization, absolute submission to Europe, and the assimilation of the culture, customs, practices, organizations, sciences, arts, life, and the whole attitude of Europe, without any exception save language; and the putting aside of every kind of self-satisfaction, and such senseless objections as arise from a mistaken, or, as we prefer to call it, a false patriotism.<sup>74</sup>

In the 1960s, Jalal Al-e Ahmad, reflecting the dominant social thinking of his time, labeled the West and Western modernity as a disease and wrote:

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<sup>74</sup> Hassan Taqizadeh was an influential intellectual during the 1906 Constitutional Revolution. During World War I, he was a pro-German journalist. During the reigns of Reza and Mohammad Reza Shah, he served as a diplomat, minister, and senator. Edward Granville Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, Classics of Persian Literature; 4 (Bethesda, Md.: Iranbooks, 1997), pp. 485-486. Also, see Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi = (Weststruckness)* (Lexington, KY: Mazdâ Publishers, 1982), p. 11.

I say that *Gharbzadegi* [afflicted with Western modernity] is like cholera. If this seems distasteful, I could say it's like heatstroke or frostbite. But no. It's at least as bad as sawflies in the wheat fields. Have you ever seen how they infest wheat? From within. There's a healthy skin in place, but it's only a skin. Just like the shell of a cicada on a tree. In any case, we're talking about a disease. A disease that comes from without fostered in an environment made for breeding diseases. . . . This *Gharbzadegi* has two heads. One is the West the other is [Self] who [is] Weststruck.<sup>75</sup>

These contrasting views of two influential political actors treated “modernity” and “traditionalism” as fixed concepts, as the main body of literature on Iran has done. While Taqizadeh valued modernity as an inevitable evolutionary path culminating in Westernization, Al-e Ahmad devalued it as a devolutionary course imposed upon Iranians by the West. A close and careful reading of Iran's modern history, however, illustrates that both Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Taqizadeh valued key political concepts that were essentially modern because those concepts did not exist in pre-modern history of Iran, and if they existed, their meanings were fundamentally different. For example, key political signifiers, such as national security or sovereignty, development or modernization, law-based governance or constitutionalism, people's rights to political participation or democracy, class equality or socialism, and shared visions of national sentiments, did not exist in pre-modern texts. But they were prominent in both Taqizadeh and Al-e Ahmad's texts. Al-e Ahmad could, therefore, be labeled as a “radical modernist” who also valued Shi'ism as the soul of an Iranian-Islamic Self. He was indeed both modern and traditional. In the same way, as Taqizadeh praised the West as an ideal type model for Iran to become sovereign, modern, lawful, democratic, and equal with “secular” and “scientific” nationalism, he favored, legitimized, and reinforced the centralization of power in the hands of Reza Shah and then Mohamad Reza Shah. In other words, Al-e Ahmad idealized moving away

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<sup>75</sup> For a review of Jalal Al-e Ahmad's conceptualization of these concepts, see Reza Bigdeli, *Bastan Gra-I Dar Tarikh-E Moaser-E Iran [Ancient Orientation in Iran's Modern History]* (Tehran: Nashr-e Markaz, 1380/2001). For more information on Hassan Taqizadeh, see Abraham Safai, *Rahbaran-E Mashrut-Eh [Constitutional Leaders]* (Tehran: Javidan 1363/1984).

from the West by returning to an Islamic-Iranian Self, but Taqizadeh did the opposite. Taqizadeh equated security, law, development, equality, and social ethics with Westernization. In contrast, Al-e Ahmad equated Westernization with a disease that retarded Iran's security, development, law, democracy, and equality while it corrupted the Iranian traditional ethics. Similar to the main body of literature on Iran, although history is the source of knowledge for both actors, each has a different conceptualization of social reality of the past and present. Although their respective social reality can be analyzed comparatively, their claim to the "truth" of that reality cannot be tested or verified based on some "objective" or "tangible" measure outside the particularity of their respective languages. As explained, inspired by elements of Foucault's archaeological works, I call these competing uses of languages "contending political discourses," which produce and reproduce their own socio, ethico, and political realities.<sup>76</sup>

To say that contending discourses produce competing realities is not to deny the existence of material reality. It to emphasize that material reality cannot speak for itself, and the "realness" of any reality is the way it is understood socially because we are incapable of accessing any "reality" independent of discourses. From this perspective, Taqizadeh and Al-e Ahmad's understanding of two competing realities are consistent with the Taylor's interpretive approach. Meanings constitute social, meanings of concepts changes in time, and competing social realities exists. Also, with the elements of Foucaultian understanding of discourses—conditions of possibility and hierarchic formation of governing statement or key concepts signified by basic signifiers.

First, Taqizadeh and Al-e Ahmad's understandings of social reality were sociohistorical phenomena, not personal mistakes, misunderstandings, flawed ideology, or false consciousness

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<sup>76</sup> See Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *On the Intellectuals (Dar Khedmat and Khianat Roshanfekran)* (Tehran: Ravaq 1356/1978).

particular to any individual actor. Many shared Taqizadeh or Al-e Ahmad claims to “knowledge” of the difference between Self and Others. In Taqizadeh’s social reality, Self was one endowed with the “knowledge” to adopt and submit to Westernization “without condition or reservation.” The Other was one who lacked the “true Knowledge.” One was depicted as “senseless,” “mistaken,” and “fanatic” with a “false” claim to “patriotism.” In contrast, in Al-e Ahmad’s social reality, Self is one endowed with the “true knowledge” to reject the West, and the Other is one who lacked the “knowledge” to fight against the decaying disease of the West. In other words, Taqizadeh and Al-e Ahmad’s social realities were two imaginations of nationalism.<sup>77</sup>

Change is the second characteristic of Taqizadeh and Al-e Ahmad’s contrasting social realities. As time and conditions of existence changed, so did social values and the knowledge of both the present and the past. In fact, Jalal Al-e Ahmad’s argument in the 1960s would not have made any sense during Taqizadeh’s time. Simply, it would not have been possible. The same is true for Taqizadeh’s argument. In the words of Foucault:

[H]istorical descriptions are necessarily ordered by the present state of knowledge, they increase with every transformation and never cease, in turn, to break with themselves. . . the most radical discontinuities are the breaks effected by a work of theoretical transformation “which establishes a science by detaching it from the ideology of its past as ideological”. . . What one is seeing, then, is the emergence of a whole field of questions, some of which are already familiar, by which a new form of history is trying to develop its own theory.<sup>78</sup>

In other words, as social realities of the present change, so do their respective histories.

The third characteristic of Taqizadeh and Al-e Ahmad’s social reality was the particularity of competing meanings. As conditions of existence and thus social reality changed, so did the meaning of basic signifiers. For example, for both Taqizadeh and Al-e Ahmad, Iran’s

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<sup>77</sup> Different histories are discovered from the perspective of the present, see Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 5.

<sup>78</sup> Jacob Torfing, *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe, and Zizek* (Oxford, UK; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 119.

encountering the West transformed Iran. For Taqizadeh, Iran's encounter with the West awakened Iran to Western enlightenment, but for Al-e Ahmad, the encounter contaminated Iran with poison. While both referred to political concepts that did not exist previously, each interpreted those concepts differently. For example, Al-e Ahmad interpreted development in relational linkage to class equality, but Taqizadeh understood it in relational linkage to the state power. Similarly, other basic signifiers—security, law, people, equality, and Islam—were interpreted differently as their hierarchic formation changed from one discourse to the next. In sum, reality is socially constructed and it changes in time, and so does the very meaning of concepts, themes, choices, and mode of rationalities expressed in the language. However, as changes occur and concepts, themes, and logics break away from their previous meanings, they maintain traces of the past in them.

In sum, a comparative analysis of Al-e Ahmad and Taqizadeh can reveal how contending discourses could have constituted the politics of nation-state building in Iran during the Pahlavi Dynasty. Although the focus of my dissertation is on the rise and fall of the Pahlavi dynasty, I contend that without understanding these discourses, explaining both the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the Islamic Republic of Iran is a difficult task, if not an impossible one.

### **The Plan of the Dissertation and Preview of My Findings**

In Chapter 2, I will begin with a brief historical background that illustrates the effects of Iran's encounter with the West. The chapter will examine the political discourse of absolute monarchism (*Saltanat-e Mutlaq*) in which the state (*houkumat*) is represented as a divine political order bestowed upon kings. Accordingly, God is regarded as the absolute sovereign, and a king is considered as God's authoritative delegate and thus the absolute sovereign on earth. In this political discourse, texts represent monarchic absolutism as “good” and in accord with the interest of the public (*maslahat umomi*). The representation of Iranian monarchic absolutism is,



however, different from Hobbesian absolutism, which assumes the inevitability of a social contract out of fear of anarchy. In contrast, Iranian monarchic absolutism is represented as a divine political order, according to the teaching of *Qur'an*. For many centuries, competing parallel structures of authority simply accepted and adhered to these practices despite the mosaic of diverse local, religious, and tribal identities in Iran. Specifically, Shi'i clerical authorities reinforced the legitimacy of this institutional practice.<sup>79</sup>

When Iran encountered Western modernity, its once stable political order, which had endured many centuries, was permeated with subversive meanings. What was previously revered as a divine political order for the people as well as the state and religious elites changed to mean the absolute source of all evil and corruption in Iran. In a land where political revolution or even a political alternative for monarchic absolutism was non-existent, many contending political discourses appeared, and each one with a particular understanding for building an ideal nation-state. By tracing the shifting of positions in texts during the late 1800s and early 1900s, six different basic signifiers appeared in various texts. Most significantly, these signifiers defined different images of an ideal political order in which the sovereign is charged with maintaining order and security, enforcing the law or constitution, modernizing or developing, creating class equality or justice, adhering to Islamic values or laws, and serving the interest of the people. For the past century, these signifiers have been a part of all contending political discourses in Iran.

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<sup>79</sup> In the empirical, positivist literature, the concept of legitimacy has been articulated and operationalized in terms of "trust," "participation," "political efficacy," "institutional power," and so forth. For example, see M. Stephen Weatherford, "Measuring Political Legitimacy," *American Political Science Review* 86, no. 1 (1992). In political theory, the question of what constitutes political legitimacy has been articulated in terms of "right and wrong," "moral and immoral," "good and evil," "impartial and impartial," "just and unjust rule," and so forth. However, the question is not settled yet. For example, see Thomas Nagel, "Moral Conflict and Political Legitimacy," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 16, no. 3 (1987). For the purpose of this dissertation, I simply define legitimacy in terms of how the ruled identify with a ruler in terms of their shared meanings in socio-ethico, historical and political values.

By the 1900s, the Iranian people wanted to establish a government based on law. Narratives associated with law or legal-rational norms permeated the meaning of security, development, democracy, class-justice, and even Islam. The basic signifier for constitutionalist was “law,” which subordinated other signifiers. Constitutionalists imagined “law” as the basis for a civilized, modern, and just Islamic nation, and imagined international agreements as the basis for having relations with other states. In other words, the meaning of a law-bound state permeated and subordinated the meanings of other signifiers. By the 1920s, however, the discourse of constitutionalism collapsed and constitutionalists became disreputable personalities associated with foreigners (*kharejian*). Security combined with development became the two basic signifiers of a political discourse, which I will call “modern absolutism.”

Chapter 3 will review the rise and fall of the discourse of modern absolutism. First, Reza Shah was represented as the absolute and divine sovereign over the people and the state. In this discourse, the divine sovereignty was de-linked from Islam and began to be linked with ancient Persian monarchies. Second, the state began to push for a particular imagination of Iranian nationalism, which was supposed to be Western-like, ironically, by a return to a collective Self that was imagined as Persians rather than Muslims. Third, the official state discourse represented Islam in an oppositional relation with Iran by representing Islam as traditional, local, and against Persians. Fourth, modern absolutism represented the state as the absolute law unto itself. Thus, the state attempted to eliminate local, tribal, and religious institutions. The change in governance made rules under modern absolutism even more arbitrary than under the personalistic rules of ancient regimes. Finally, modern absolutism represented class-based identities as anti-development, anti-Persian, anti-Iranian nationalism, and a Russian conspiracy. At the time,

Iranian nationalism idealized the German race as its closest kin, and the state policy reflected this sympathy.

With World War II raging, Iran declared neutrality. Suspicious of Reza Shah's sympathy with Germany, the Allied forces invaded Iran in 1941 and forced Reza Shah to abdicate. Consequently, the official state discourse collapsed. Once again, the Iranian contending discourses began to compete for hegemony—to become the official state discourse. From 1941 to 1951, constitutionalists and monarchists shared control of the state while Islamists, socialists, and nationalists struggled to take over the state. Chapter 4 will examine this period.

By 1949, it appeared that Mohamad Reza Shah managed to re-officialize the identity of modern absolutism, but he began to lose the collective imagination of the people. At the time, the intense hatred for British ownership of the Iranian oil industry became the symbol under which the fragmented body of the nation united. Muhammad Mussadiq led this mobilization and eventually took over the state in 1951. The basic signifier for Mussadiq's discourse was the "people," which was linked to concepts, such as the people's sovereignty, independence, citizenship rights, democracy, and representative government. During his tenure, a particular meaning of the people's sovereignty permeated and subordinated the meanings of law, modernization, class, Islam, and the people.

First, by the representing the people as a singular sovereign in struggle against foreigners, a particular Iranian nationalism was constructed that defined its singular Self in terms of a long historical struggle against foreign domination. At the time, Iranian nationalism became defined in terms of its struggle against the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. This particular nationalism drastically differed from that of the official nationalism during the leadership of Reza Shah or Mohammad Reza Shah. Second, the law was interpreted differently. Unlike constitutionalists

who considered laws as the sovereign between the state and society, or modernists who imagined laws as the embodiment of the will of the shah-centered state, democratic nationalists imagined laws as subordinated to the will of the people. Muhammad Mussadiq said, “The law was for the people and not the people for the law.” Third, development was described as economic self-reliance, which led to pursuing policies of economic autarky rather than economic interdependence and Westernization as Mohamad Reza Shah wanted to pursue. Fourth, Islam was valued as the people’s shared vision of good against evil in perpetuity and not as a traditional norm versus modernity as Reza Shah or Mohamad Reza represented. Fifth, class was described in terms of the boundary between good and bad rules, not workers and capitalists. For example, for democratic nationalists, class symbolized a relational opposition between the poor and the rich, the just and unjust, the Iranians and the foreigners. In the United States, as well as the court in Iran, Iranian anti-British nationalism was represented as pro-communism. Chapter 5 will review this period.

In 1953, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) backed a military coup that toppled the regime. Once again, a new political discourse became the official state discourse. I call this discourse “monarchic modernism” because it was personalistic and also modern. Although this new imagining of Iran had traces of Reza Shah’s modern absolutism, it was a new interpretation of an ideal state. Chapter 6 will examine this period, which covers Iranian political development from 1953 to 1979.

In Chapter 6, I will discuss how the official state discourse alienated the state from its own society and provided conditions conducive for constructing a hegemonic bloc against it. Chapter 6 will consist of four successive eras of restoration, reform, consolidation, and collapse of Mohamad Reza Shah’s regime. I interpret how the discursive practices of the state delegitimized

it and thus provided the conditions of conceivability for the construction of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. Despite the state's having an absolute monopoly over the resources and institutions of the country, it lost its discursive power in the sense that it could no longer produce shared meanings, values, and knowledge. It could not, therefore, produce consent or fear. I have divided Chapter 6 into four eras. The first era begins with the restoration of Mohamad Reza Shah by the CIA. During this era, the discourse of monarchic modernism lost much of its representation power and communicated by fear rather than building consensus or legitimacy. In contrast, contending discourses succeeded in representing the shah as an illegitimate agent of the United States. Contending discourses also devalued the state's developmental projects as a form of Western domination.<sup>80</sup>

The second era began in 1961 and ended in 1964. The impetus for the 1953 CIA coup had begun with the shift of power from the Truman administration to the Eisenhower administration. The "reform era" also began with the shift of power from the Eisenhower administration to the Kennedy administration. During this era, fearing a revolution in Iran, the Kennedy administration pressured Mohamad Reza Shah to be less obsessed with security and show more interest in economic and political reform. As a result of this shift, the shah reluctantly appointed Ali Amini, whom Kennedy preferred, to lead a reformist government in Iran. Eventually, Amini's government failed, but the shah adopted some of Kennedy's reformist agenda and presented the agenda as his own.

However, the shah's reform delegitimized the state even further. In addition to the opposition by the nationalists and socialists, even conservative clerics and landed elites (the

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<sup>80</sup> For the purpose of this dissertation, I define legitimacy as shared meanings in social values, norms, practices, and expectations between the state and the people. In a Foucaudian sense, legitimacy is when rulers and ruled are embedded in the same political discourse.

shah's traditional supporters in modern Iran) began to oppose the state. Instead of deconsolidation of power, the "reform" resulted in increasing the size of the state and concentrated even more power in the hands of the shah and a small circle of his cronies who controlled all the state's resources and institutions. By 1964, once again, U.S. policy on Iran shifted from economic reform back to security concerns. So the reform era ended, and the era of consolidation of power began in a shah-centered state backed by the United States.

The third era began when state revenues increased to the extent that the state no longer needed foreign aid or loans. During this era of absolute consolidation of power, the shah-centered state practices and policies began to be interpreted according to, and associated with, two different webs of meanings. In the official state discourse, the shah was represented as the provider of security, law, progress, justice, and ethics, but also as the divine embodiment of the Persian-Aryan nation. The shah was also the key player for Iran's alliance with the West in general and the United States in particular. However, for a great majority of the people, the shah's language, policies, and practices were interpreted as the means of foreign domination and the source of fear. In this era, the shah ruled by instilling fear, and the people lived with this fear as a natural part of the existential reality. As a result, there was a sense of societal quiescence, but not necessarily consensus or agreement with the state. But the state failed to repress the voices of secular or religious intellectual community whose common language of resistance represented fearing the state as unpatriotic, un-Islamic, and anti-historical. Political activists represented the shah-centered state as the "Servant of American imperialism." American imperialism was represented as a crumbling empire, not to be feared, but at the time, the meaning of imperialism differed from one contending discourse to another. For Islamists, imperialism meant an imperial non-Muslim power. For socialists, imperialism meant a capitalist

power and thus an anti-working class state. For nationalists, imperialism meant a non-Iranian dominator. Nevertheless, the association between the shah and U.S. imperialism was articulated in the same phrase: “The shah was the agent of imperialism.” Mohamad Reza Shah and American were represented as though they were one.

The fourth era of collapse began at the height of the shah’s power. A hegemonic bloc consisting of contending discourses began to communicate with a common language of resistance against the U.S.-Iran alliance. In other words, a discursive hegemony was being constructed. In this hegemony, contending discourses glorified a life-and-death struggle against the shah and the United States.

In this hegemony, acquiescence to the power of the shah or the United States was devalued as anti-Iranian nationalism, un-Islamic, and anti-historical. On the other hand, the struggle against them became a sign of social honor. Writers, poets, moviemakers, actors, and religious clerics imprisoned by the shah became the role model for resistance against the regime. The language that political activists had articulated for decades permeated the common language of the people. Accordingly, values, concepts, themes, and rationalities associated with resisting, fighting, and dying for a common cause of overthrowing the regime became a part of the language. In this hegemony, while the differences among socialists, nationalists, and Islamists were muted, the ideal for struggling against the regime was privileged.

In this hegemony, material and institutional resources available to the state were interpreted differently. Unlike previous eras during which the state’s monopoly of means of coercion, surveillance, control, discipline, and regulation were interpreted as omnipotent, fearsome, and indestructible, suddenly the same resources and institutions were interpreted as impotent, benign, and fragile. In the hegemonic discourse of resistance, the state’s tanks, guns,

and soldiers turned into toys for young people in the street, and contending discourses began to represent the unity of the people as omnipotent, fearsome, and indestructible.<sup>81</sup> From then on, the state could not produce legitimacy or fear.

The people had once quietly accepted Mohamad Reza Shah's representation and enforcement of developmental projects, law, class justice, and social norms as natural realities of the time, but now they suddenly no longer accepted them as such. In fact, what was accepted as inevitable reality began to anger them as unethical norms that had to be stopped. Moreover, the shah's signification of providing security for the country was understood in terms of insecurity for the people and security for foreigners. In sum, the shah-centered state lost its productive power to discipline or punish and to regulate or control the people. It also lost its ability to create legitimacy. Once the state lost its power to rule, the violent overthrow of the regime appeared inevitable.

As Mohamad Reza Shah's regime was collapsing, "Islam" became the primary signifier under which a great majority of people united with one voice—the shah must go, and Khomeini ought to rule. But in this unison, a multiplicity of voices, values, and rationalities arose which had previously been constructed in contending discourses in Iran. Nevertheless, for a particular moment in time and space, in the collective imagination of an overwhelming number of Iranians, there appeared a monolithic voice that identified Self in an opposition relation with the shah as its main Other. The result was the collapse of the regime.

In sum, this dissertation is an attempt to offer an interpretation of the history of political development during the Pahlavi dynasty by focusing on how contending discourses in Iran constituted the politics of nation-state building in Iran during the Pahlavi's dynasty. By making a

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<sup>81</sup> However, this unity formally disappeared only 24 days after the establishment of the Islamic Republic when the state ordered all female employees to wear *Hejab* (Islamic dress code).



historical narrative of the emergence of political discourses in modern Iran, and by understanding the official state discourses, Iran's political development can be described and explained from angles that have not yet been described. This dissertation describes how the meaning of state building, nation-imagining, and relations with other states changed from one era to another. I maintain that without understanding the contending discourses in Iran, neither the past nor the present of Iran can adequately be explained.

By interpreting the hierarchic formation of Iran's contending discourses, I conclude that the Islamic Republic of Iran incorporates ideals previously constructed in modern discourses. Those ideals were incorporated into "Islamic Republic" and were represented as the most democratic, most class-just, most independent, and most developed Islamic state. In other words, an ideal-typical utopia was constructed and the people actually treated that utopia as a "real" alternative. The utopia of the Islamic Republic did not, however, take more than a few months to shrink to the size of its constituents—a small but cohesive portion of Iranians. For Iranian scholarship, however, the utopia of an ideal-type Western modernity continues, so does the binary representation of Iran for many in the West and some Iran.

This dissertation has argued that analyses based on reductionistic, fixed, and immutable representations reveal a certain degree of Self as they hide much more about others within. This is what happened to Reza Shah and Mohamad Reza Shah. They both muted the voices of others in Iran at a cost, and, as it turned out, with no tangible outcomes. Tracing the multiplicity of voices from the past into the present facilitates understanding of what might fit within the realm of possibility or not. In the case of Iran, realizing what is possible or not can minimally help avoid costly confron

## CHAPTER 2 THE EMERGENCE OF THE IRANIAN NATION-STATE

### Introduction

If the shah believes in his divine duties, he must realize that all people are equal before the eyes of God. . . . If the shah wants to be the Shepard of his flock, he must serve them diligently. . . . While the shah may want foreigners as his masters, let him be the slave, but we the people do not, and will not allow foreigners to enslave us. . . . If the shah's ministers want to sell the country in the name of Islam, we will not allow them. . . . The shah must not think that we are afraid of him, we are *Fadaian* [those who would sacrifice their lives for the good of others], who sacrifice Self for the manifestation of justice on earth.

—Excerpts from *Roohul-Qudos*, a daily paper published in 1907.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1920s, Iran began to build a modern nation-state according to a particular imagination of Self in relation to its internal and external Others. This chapter attempts to provide a brief historical background for how that imagination was constructed. First, I will discuss the fall of the state official discourse, which constituted how various tribal dynasties, at least since the Shah Abbas regime in the 16th century, understood and related to their surrounding world.<sup>2</sup> Then I will explain the embedded values and concepts in the official state discourse of monarchic absolutism in Iran. Next, I will show how Iran's encountering the West in the 1800s resulted in the shifting of values, concepts, images, and myths associated with Iran's political order. Accordingly, in the 1800s, the state-elites, religious authorities, and local governors glorified the Iranian monarchic absolutism as a divine Islamic order that provided security and peace for the Muslim Iranian subjects. By signifying security and Islam as the two basic components of Iran's political order, the shah exercised his power indirectly, the Shi'i

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<sup>1</sup> Nasrolah Falsafee, *Zendagan E Shah Abbas Aval (History of Shah Abbas I)*, 5 vols. (Tehran: Tehran University 1965/1344), v. 3, p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> In this dissertation, I do not capitalize the word "shah," which simply means "king," when I am using the word as a generic name. However, I capitalize the word when it is a part of a proper name, for example, Shah Abbas, Reza Shah.

clergy implemented Islamic jurisprudence through their network, and local or tribal authorities governed on behalf of the shah. However, beginning in the mid-1800s, the state, religious, and local elites began to represent the shah's absolutism as the cause of the people's insecurity and acquiescence to the threat of Britain and Russia as the threat to Islamic Self. Constitutive of these drastic shifts were the articulation of new demands based on previously non-existing concepts, such as law-based governance or constitutionalism, development or progress, national or people's rights, and class justice or socialism—concepts that had entered into the language as the result of Iran's encountering the West. Finally, by briefly examining the Tobacco Uprising of 1890-1891 and the 1906 constitutional revolution, I will explain the construction of a hegemonic bloc. This bloc was united in its opposition to the presence of British foreigners. `

### **The Political Discourse of Monarchic Absolutism (*Saltanat-e-Motlaq-eh*)**

From the reign of Shah Abbas Safavid (1587-1629) until the 1906 constitutional revolution, the discourse of monarchic absolutism had been the official state political discourse. Despite changes in tribal dynasties since Shah Abbas I, all monarchs more or less followed the basic tenets of the discourse in the way Shah Abbas had exercised power.

Once Shah Abbas consolidated his power by eliminating or reducing his military reliance on any one tribe, especially his own *Qizilbash* tribe, he drew military resources from Persian and Tajik populations, as well as non-Muslim forces, such as Armenians and Georgians, into his military. He sold trading and territorial rights to the highest bidders rather than to local and tribal authorities. He broke any tribe or family that became too wealthy or powerful. He outsourced revenue rights and appointed administrative rights and concession rights to local and tribal authorities. He banned Sufism and other religious movements that appeared subversive to the state official religion—Shi'ism. He built a strong administrative and bureaucratic infrastructure (*dar-bAryan*). He also co-opted high-ranking clergy who could explain the justification for the

shah's political positions and practices to the people. These policies created a sort of division of labor between the official and non-official *ulama* who, at times, mitigated the abuse of power by the courtiers.<sup>3</sup> On foreign policy, Shah Abbas tried to create a balance of power by siding with Christian and European powers against the Ottoman Empire.

Shah Abbas's official political discourse (monarchic absolutism) continued to be the official state discourse of various tribal dynasties in Iran until the 1906 constitutional revolution. In this discourse, power flowed downward from kings into parallel, hierarchic, and interdependent structures of authority within the court, religious institutions, and tribal, rural, and urban authorities. Intertextually, the shah was depicted in binary representations, such as sovereign-subjects, patriarch-children, master-slaves, and shepherd-flock. Similarly, until the early 1800s, the absolutism of monarchs was represented as the manifestation of the king's power, glory, greatness, and the extent to which they could protect the country from the possibility of external threats and prevent local, religious, and ethnic conflicts. Religious texts represented monarchic absolutism and the providence of God's will on earth, which made justice on earth possible.

In the official state discourse of *Saltanat-e-Motlaqeh* (monarchic absolutism), kings of Iran were the absolute protector of religion (*din*), state (*dulat* or *houkumat*), and the people (*mellat*).<sup>4</sup> In other words, the kings of Iran embodied the power vested in the state and exercised their power through three competing structures of authority—state, religious, and local authorities. The court appointees represented the shah or the state's interest. *Ulama* (religious authorities)

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<sup>3</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, Princeton Studies on the near East (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 9-49.

<sup>4</sup> In older Persian texts, the distinction between the state (*houkumat*) and government (*doulat*) does not exist, and the distinction between the meanings of people *mellat* and "nation" does not exist. Both of these distinctions are embedded in Western discourses of national sovereignty.

represented the interest of the Shi'i establishment, and they appointed judges, operated seminaries and schools, managed endowed lands, supervised religious rituals, interpreted Sharia law, and acted as trustees, scribes, and advisors for the people often before the court officials. On local levels, tribal, urban, and rural authorities governed and enforced rules based on local customs and expectations, provided physical security, and collected taxes. However, in this form of governance, concepts such as development, legal/rational norms, citizenship rights, or socioeconomic justice did not exist, and no one expressed outrage for the country's state of underdevelopment, lack of law, justice, or human rights. In these pyramid-like structures of authority, power flowed downward, from the shah to his courtiers, from courtiers to local and tribal authorities down to the people, and from *ulama* to their followers.<sup>5</sup>

In the discourse, kings had absolute authority over lives and properties of his *mellat* (people), and *mellat* included tribal, rural, and urban people—Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Although kings in Iran were not considered infallible or divine, their rules, however, were considered divinely approved. As such, *ulama* represented the institution of monarchy as a divine and legitimate Islamic order, which helped maintain the public interest (*maslahat ommomi*) and ensured the enforcement of God's laws (*Sharia*).<sup>6</sup> In other words, in the pre-modern political discourse of Iran, Iranian kings were at the apex of power and authority, and their power flowed downward to the state officials, local, and religious authorities. As such, while the shah was not considered divine or holy, the order was represented as divine, Islamic, and holy. Hence, following the absolute authority of the shah was a religious duty, and questioning his wisdom was not supposed to be knowable to the people. The presumption,

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<sup>5</sup> Nikki R. Keddie, *Iran, Religion, Politics and Society* (London: F. Cass, 1980), p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> The tenets of the discourse of monarchic absolutism were first proposed and to a certain degree practiced by the Shi'ite prime minister of the two of Saljuk Tribal dynasty, Nezam Al-Mulk-e Tusi (1018-1092).

production, and reproduction of the divine right of sovereignty served not only the interest of the state, but also the interest of religious and local authorities.

Accordingly, for *ulama*, the absolute power of kings was deemed necessary for the prevention of internal disintegration by local conflict or external occupation by non-Muslim or non-Shi'i rulers. For kings of Iran, the autonomous power of *ulama* was deemed necessary. *Ulama* legitimized the absolutism of monarchs since Shi'i institutions provided working rules, norms, and ethics that assured the reproduction and reinforcement of the system. For local authorities, receiving support from the shah-centered state assured their property rights, as well as secured their concessionary rights to collect rents and taxes on behalf of the state—a profit in its own right. Reciprocally, kings relied on local authorities for receiving revenue and troops from local authorities.

However, for this mutual inter dependency to work, kings had to maintain a delicate balance between two opposing needs. One need was to have the presence of strong local authorities on behalf of the shah. The other was to ensure that no local authority would be or seemed to be stronger than the shah was. Hence, in outsourcing concessions rights to the highest bidders, kings picked the strongest tribal chiefs or wealthy local families to rule, and purposely pitted local authorities against each other. As expected, local authorities were always forced to some degree to attend to the needs of their local constituents in order to maintain their power against their local competitors. In brief, the existence of parallel structures of competing authorities served the interest of the state by maintaining control at local levels, but leaving local authorities to govern according to local needs and necessities. This system of governance proved very stable for centuries.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, pp. 9-49.

In tribes, villages, towns, and cities, the people were always at the bottom of these pyramids of power structures, but that is not to say that local authorities could exercise power as they wished. Most Iranian communities were geographically dispersed, economically self-sufficient, ethnically-homogenous, and inward-looking. Therefore, despite the arbitrariness of rule at the apex of the power structure, local authorities had to rule by consensus among competing authorities and respective constituencies.<sup>8</sup> Otherwise, local resistance or uprisings would diminish the power of local authority and would force the shah to appoint new *valis* (local representatives of the state). While the shah's rule was absolutist in name, in practice and at local levels, rules were negotiated to fit the needs and necessities of the locality. However, the stability of the system began to fall apart when these practices, policies, customs, and norms began to change.

By the mid-1850s, texts had already begun to represent monarchic absolutism as the sign of the state's weakness, religious corruption, and local conflict. After the two Russo-Persian wars of 1813 and 1826 forced Prince Abbas Mirza (1789-1833) to accept the two Treaties of Golestan and Turkaman-chay, a clear shift began in texts, policies, and practices of the state, religious, local authorities.<sup>9</sup> Texts, originating within the court, began to devalue monarchic absolutism as a corrupt order that needed to be replaced with what was termed as *nezam-e-jadid* (the new order). Iran's first serious experience with modernity was its military confrontation with Russia. Its first attempt to modernize began from and within the state structure. The court began to modernize its military. Prince Abbas Mirza (1789-1833) sent the first group of Iranian students to Western countries, hired Western advisers, imported military technology, and helped train the

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<sup>8</sup> Guive Mirfendereski, *A Diplomatic History of the Caspian Sea: Treaties, Diaries, and Other Stories*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> For more information on treaties of the wars in 1813 and 1828, see Nikki R. Keddie and Yann Richard, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003).

first generation of bureaucrats. The devaluing of the old order had begun by merely changing existing policies and practices. Texts originating from some of the religious authorities also began to represent monarchic absolutism as the sign of state corruption—not as the providence of God’s will on Earth. These religious authorities portrayed monarchic absolutism as un-Islamic behavior. Religious scholars began to represent monarchic absolutism as religious corruption that had resulted in the defeat of *omat-e-islam* (nation of Muslims) at the hands of the Russians. Locally, monarchic absolutism was no longer the source of order but that of disorder.

By the 1870s, Iran’s experience with modernity was one of military defeats by the Russians in the north and economic and political domination by the British forces in the south. In other words, as the result of Iran’s encounter with Western modernity, the dominant political discourse of Iran began to weaken and eventually collapse. For the first time in Iranian history, concepts such as development, law, nationalism, class-justice, and security entered into the language of politics. It was in this context that the Tobacco Uprising occurred.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For this section, I have been partly informed by the following scholarly works in addition to re-reading some of their references. For example: Sayed Javad Tabatabai, *Ta'amoli Dar Bareyeh Iran: Deebacheh-Ey Bar Nazariahey Anheta't E Iran. (a Collection in Decline of Political Theory)*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Nashre Mo'ser, 2001/1380).

Sayed Javad Tabatabai, *Zaval E Andeesheh Syasee Dar Iran (the Decline of Political Theory in Iran)* (Tehran: Kavir 1998/1377). Also, Edward Browne, *A Year among the Persians* (London Black Company, 1950).

Keddie and Richard, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*.

Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*.

Ann Katharine Swynford Lambton, *The Persian Land Reform, 1962-1966* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), Ann Katharine Swynford Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia: A Study of Land Tenure and Land Revenue Administration*, 1st ed. (London; Oxford, 1969), Ann Katherine Swynford Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam: An Introduction to the Study of Islamic Political Theory*, London Oriental Series; V. 36 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979* (New York: New York University Press, 1981), Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*.

John Foran, *Fragile Resistance: Social Transformation in Iran from 1500 to the Revolution* (Boulder, Colorado Westview Press, 1993).



## The Tobacco Uprising

In 1890, in exchange for £15,000, Naser Al-din Shah (who reigned from 1831-1896) “handed over the complete control of the production, purchase, sale, and export of Iranian tobacco to the British Rege company.”<sup>11</sup> With this concession, a massive campaign against the shah began. Merchants refused to deal with the British company. Sayed Jamal Afghani (1839-1897) began a letter campaign to convince the Shi’i clerical establishment to use their pulpits (*manbars*) to mobilize the people against the concession. Ayatollah Mirza Hassan Shirazi, a respected religious scholar (*Mujtahed*) in Najaf, issued a *fatwa* (religious edict) that banned the consumption of all tobacco products. People from all occupations, including wives of the shah, obeyed the *fatwa* and a national political movement was born. The shah had no choice but to cancel the concession and pay damages to the British company, which also included future profits. The Tobacco Uprising was a historical turning point that demarcated traditional political discourses from modern discourses. During the Tobacco Uprising, for the first time, Iranians articulated concepts that were unprecedented in the way the relationship between the ruled and rulers was represented in at least four different ways.

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Nezam Al-mulk, *Politics (Seeya'sat Nameh)*, ed. Abdul Rahim Khalkhali (Tehran 1936/1310).

Abdul Hussein Zarin-kub, *Dar Jeztejoya Tasvof Dar Iran (a Survey of Sufism in Iran)* vol. 2 (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1376/1997).

Jacob Edward Polak, *Persian, Das Land Und Seine* trans. Kikavus Johndari (Bowohener: Ethnographische Schilderugen, 1865).

Polak, *Persian, Das Land Und Seine*

Additionally, a great deal of understanding can be deduced from the reading of European travelers to Iran, as well as Iranian travelers to Europe. For example see Suroosh Irfani, *Iran's Islamic Revolution: Popular Liberation or Religious Dictatorship?* (Lahore, Pakistan Vanguard Books Ltd., 1983), p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> Irfani, *Iran's Islamic Revolution: Popular Liberation or Religious Dictatorship?*

First, during the Tobacco Uprising, the very concept of the shah's absolute divinity was re-represented as the cause of insecurity among the people and lack of Iran's sovereignty rather than security and absolute sovereignty of the shah. This was a discursive shift.

Second, the Tobacco Uprising was an urban-based mass movement that shared a vision of a national rather than a tribal or local community. For the first time in centuries, the concept of a shared vision of an Iranian national community was being formed. Unlike previous eras when the shared vision of a community centered on parochial and familial interests and visions, the shared vision of the community in this era centered on an emerging "imagined community" of Muslim Iranian people.

Third, the primary demand of the people during the uprising was for the establishment of a House of Justice (*Khanah Edalat*). It was not, however, clear as to whether the House of Justice would be based on Islamic or secular laws. As it turned out, this question was not and has not yet been settled. However, the essence of establishing a House of Justice was proof of the weakening of the official state discourse and the permeation of new concepts into the language.

Finally, the emergence of Iranian modern nationalism was mainly mobilized, organized, and led by the Shi'i clergy in the name of the "nation of Muslim Iranian (*Melat-e Musalman-e Iran*)."<sup>12</sup> As it turned out, the clerical leadership in Iran again became a vanguard for mobilizing people in different episodes of Iran's modern history. The majority of the Shi'i clergy were using a familiar language of the nation of Muslims or (*umma*), which discursively was in relational opposition to non-Muslim nations. Using the familiar language of the nation of the Iranian people (*Melat*) was, in some sense, in relational opposition to the state (*Dolat*). In this discourse, the people were interpreted as a unified body of Iranians and Muslims in their relational

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<sup>12</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. For the concept of imagined community, see Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, pp. 58-61.

opposition or differences to the state and non-Muslims. The interpretation of the people also meant the emergence of a particular Iranian nationalism that imagined Self in opposition to an enemy with two faces. One face of this enemy was the court and the other face was foreign powers increasingly controlling the affairs of the court and the shah—Britain or Russia. Iran's modern nationalism thus emerged by imagining Self in opposition to internal and external enemies manifested in the court and intertwined with governmental policy and practices. The conceptualization of the court as a nest of foreigner powers continued to play a role in shaping Iran's modern history.

The construction of a nation-state took place within the context of an intense colonial competition between Russia and Britain over the territorial, economic, and political control of Iran. Iran's first serious experiencing of Western modernity was its two military defeats of 1813 and 1827 by Russian armies. These defeats weakened the state's economic and political sovereignty and opened the way for further Russian interventions and the gradual loss of Iranian sovereignty. The situation deteriorated when Britain also entered into Iranian politics. In a competitive race to expand its imperial power, Britain began buying concessions and revenue collection rights from the court in addition to import-rights. Gradually, British goods flooded the local markets, which resulted in the weakening of traditional manufacturing bases of Iran—mostly local and small manufacturing bases. Britain also managed to impose a favorable tax advantage for its goods. By 1920, Britain was in control of many aspects of political, economic, and foreign policy decision-making.<sup>13</sup> These imperial competitions shaped the formations of Iranian nationalism through which Iranians began to see themselves as perpetual victims of the

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<sup>13</sup> Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*, p. 167. Also see Fereydoon Adamiyat, *Freedom and Thoughts and the Setting of Constitutional Movement (Fekr Aza'dy Va Moqademeh Yeh Neza't Moshroeya't)* (Tehran Entesharat-e-Sokhan 1961/1340), p. 54.

both Russia and Britain. In this dichotomization between Self and Others, most texts valorized resistance against foreigners, although the meaning of foreignness changed from one era to next and from one contending discourse to the next. Moreover, texts valorized the struggle against the corruption in the state, although what was now perceived as “corrupt” were the routine business practices of patrimonial politics of the past.

The representation of the West was not, however, always negative. In the 1800s, in addition to experiencing Western colonial practices, Iranian elites simultaneously learned about the emancipatory and modern aspects of the West. Iranian elites admired the West for its rich philosophy, science, technologies, and governance, which the state-elites found to be the reason for the West being superior to Iran. Texts written during the second half of the 1800s illustrate that elites already had become very familiar with the Western philosophers, such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Descartes, Montesquieu, Spencer, Darwin, Mill, Bantam, and Tocqueville. State-elites were also repeating the aspiration of the French Revolution—*Liberté, égalité, fraternité*. By 1905, the state-elites had become familiar with the differences between the Russian, Japanese, Germany, and British models of state-building, and, depending on their perspectives, development had become a value intertextually, albeit in different interpretation.<sup>14</sup>

The state-elites desired to modernize the country based on Western models. In his memoir, Mehdi-ih Mokhber al-Duleh, a prominent minister and constitutionalist, wrote that everyone who struggles to establish a constitutional government “has a book about the French Revolution and yearns to play the role of Dante, and they are hot with fiery words.”<sup>15</sup> The result of these

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<sup>14</sup> For a list of some of these elites and their familiarity with the Western political thought, see Mehdi Quli Hedayat, *Khaterat Va Khatarat (Memories and Dangers)* (Tehran: 1950/1329), p. 9. For a complete review of the Constitutional Review, see the special edition of Political & Economic Ettela’at, v. 227-230, Nov. 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Hamid Dabashi, *Iran: A People Interrupted* (New York: NEW PRESS, 2007), p. 69.

multiple experiences of Western modernity was the devaluing of traditional discourses and the emergences of new discourses, and each with a different way of imagining Iran.

### **Collapse of the Discourse of Monarchic Absolutism**

By the late 1800s, Western modernity had deeply penetrated the traditional institutions of the court and the Shi'i's institutions in unexpected ways.<sup>16</sup> The result was the weakening and eventual collapse of the traditional discourses of monarch absolutism, which was based on security and order imposed by the shah.

First, Iran's encounter with the West seriously undermined the court's existential relations not only with its own elite class, but also with the local as well as religious authorities. As previously explained, since the Shah Abbas reign (1587-1629) and until the early part of the 1906 constitutional revolution, the official state discourse (*Saltanat-e Motlaq-eh*) valued the shah as the absolute personification of power of the state, and the shah ruled indirectly through parallel structures of local authorities. Accordingly, the shah's absolutism was articulated in terms of a divine political design that was necessary for maintaining peace, order, and security. However, after the Tobacco Uprising, some state-elites and religious elites, as well as local authorities challenged the official state discourse. For example, after Mirza Reza Kermani assassinated *Naser al-Din Shah* during the shah's pilgrimage to the shrine of the *Shah Abd al-Azim*, a Shi'i respected sanctuary in northern Tehran, the interrogator posed this question to Mirza:

If you really care about the country and as you say wished to protect the dignity of the nation, then why did you not worry about creating chaos and anarchy? Kermani responds: You are right. But if you look at the history of European countries, you'll see that there is no great purpose that is not achieved through bloodshed.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Shi'ite* is a noun and *Shi'i* is an adjective.

<sup>17</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, pp. 60-70.

This text is a mere instance of two contending discourses in their struggle for meanings. While both Kermani and his interrogator understood the relation between the shah's life and the significance of "order" and "peace," as opposed to "chaos and anarchy," Kermani devalued them and preferred restructuring of the existing order as the Europeans had done in the past. Kermani was a new generation of *roshanfekran* or "enlightened ones." The term had floated into the Persian language by the state-elites from the French language. However, what was more important than the word was the narrative that was associated with the word *Roshanfekr*. The narrative of enlightenment was associated with concepts, such as development, progressive history, laws, people's right of citizenship, class justice, and secular ethics. These concepts were, however, new in the language and practices of the state and the society. Relatedly, the very naming, knowing, and representing of these concepts were subversive because all of them were represented in relational differences to values, concepts, and narratives associated with the official state discourse.

By the late 1800s, various texts represented the shah's autocratic power as the source of bad government. His absolutism was portrayed as a wicked design perpetuated by foreigners and enforced by lackey courtiers. These attitudinal shifts in the discourse translated into the weakening of authority on all levels of governance.

First, the relationship between the court and the people changed. The extensive network of patrimonial relations that the Qajar dynasty (1781-1925) had built began to breakdown rather rapidly. On the one hand, the economic, military, and political superiority of the West was reducing the court's revenue rights, destroying the self-sufficiency of local economies and

creating social unrest.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, the emancipatory aspects of Western modernity were beginning to delegitimize the court from within and without.

The weakening of the court continued to corrupt the very fabric of the court and its relationship with itself and the people. Even Naser al-Din Shah, who once saw himself as the shadow of God on earth, became infatuated with the glory of the West. In Iranian mythology, the shah of Iran was referred to as the *Shahanshah*, which literally means the king of kings. In the collective imagination of Iranians, the shah of Iran was in fact perceived as the king of kings in the same way he was depicted in the stone carving in Persepolis. According to these images and narratives associated with them, the shah of Iran would annually receive kings, dignitaries, and governors of other states, who would come from near and far to show their respect, submission, and loyalty for the great *Shahanshah of Iran*. Accordingly, they would kneel in front of his majesty and submissively offer their expensive gifts. This representation of the shah of Iran, as the center of the world and the king of kings, had been taken as inevitable natural facts of social reality for centuries, was now collapsing. The shah was no longer viewed as the king of kings, and Iran as the center of the world.

Relatedly, the Shi'i clergy had helped legitimize this image since the Safavid dynasty. On rare occasions, the clergy submissively had protested the abuses of kings' appointees through private channels, but never did they question the absolute authority of kings over life, property, and liberty of the people. Neither did the clergy question the legitimacy of monarchic order.

By the mid-1800s, this image of the shah of Iran had collapsed along with the mythical reverence for the institution of the court and the Iranian monarchic order. In the discourse, the West had become the center of the world and the locus of power and glory, even for the shah of

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<sup>18</sup> Abrahamian argued that the standard of living began to decline in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. See Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*, p. 286.

Iran. For example, Naser al-Din Shah himself traveled to Europe three times—of course on borrowed money from Britain. The act of visiting Europe had become prestigious, and for the state-elites as well as the shah, traveling to Europe or getting a Western education became a distinguished honor. The West had become the Promised Land. In the collective imagination of the people, the center of the world had shifted from Iran and the Iranian court to Europe and the European courts. Instead of Iranian kings receiving kings from other states, the shah of Iran wished to be received by European leaders.

By the 1920s, the once powerful and proud Qajar dynasty was subsidized by Britain, and Ahmad Shah—the last of the Qajar dynasty—had no memory of what it meant to be the shah of Iran. In a letter, Sir Percy Loraine, the *chargé d'affaires* of the British Foreign Office in Tehran, reported to his superior, Lord Curzon in London: Ahmad Shah is so fearful [referring to Ahmad Shah's domestic opposition] that he has requested “to pay another visit to Europe, and thus escape fresh and possibly final humiliations.” Then Loraine expressed his regret for not being able to convince Ahmad Shah to remain in Tehran and defend his own crown.<sup>19</sup> The narrative ends when the British granted Ahmad Shah permission to leave Tehran with some pocket money. At the time, the people referred to Ahmad Shah as “Ahmad *alaaf*,” which means “Ahmad the loiterer.” The representation of the shah of Iran as a street loiterer was an indication of changing values as how Iranian imagines the shah. In brief, as the result of Iran's encountering the West, the discourse of monarchic absolutism collapsed and the shah of Iran was no longer understood as God's shadow on earth.

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<sup>19</sup> Ahmad Movasghi, *Modernization and Reform in Iran; from Theory to Practice* (Tehran: Ghoomes 2006/1385), p. 172.



## The Shifts in the Discourse of Shi'ism

The encountering of the West also began to change Shi'ism. For many centuries, the institution of Shi'ism—headed by *ulama*—enjoyed the support of faithful followers, had financial independence from the state, and they enjoyed a large network of mosques, schools, and seminaries inside and outside of Iran's territory. This relative autonomy gave *ulama* a certain degree of political immunity from the state's coercive means. Previously, the Shi'i clergy had used its power to moderate to some degree the excessive abuses of the court while it simultaneously legitimized and reproduced the Iranian monarchic absolutism as a divine political order.<sup>20</sup> However, by the mid-1800s, the traditional role of *ulama* began to change.

As the court began to lose its power, it also lost the overwhelming support of *ulama*. *Ulama* no longer could rely on the court to maintain the internal peace in the country or prevent the threat of external interventions. What had begun as a gradual shift reached its peak during the Tobacco Uprising. *Ulama* resented the court for capitulating to the British interventions. This resentment was in sharp contrast with *ulama*'s position at the beginning of the 1800s. Ervand Abrahamian wrote about these shifting positions:

Europeans, such as Quseley, Morier, and Sheil, freely attended mosque services, passion plays, and even Muharram flagellation ceremonies. Moreover, Christian missionaries freely opened schools, printing houses, and churches without encountering major hostility from either the government or the Muslim population. . . . The mood, however, changed as the result of the foreign war, and particularly after the humiliating Turkaman-chay treaty.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The autonomy of Shi'ism became especially relevant during Naser Al-din Shah when Ayatollah Morteza Ansari was able to unite all Shi'ite under his leadership (*marjaiat*). See Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 71.

<sup>21</sup> Nikki R. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal Ad-Din Al-Afghani: A Political Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

In short, as the result of Iran's encountering the West, its dominant political discourse collapsed. While the court lost the traditional support of *ulama*, the established clerical began to lose its own legitimacy.

For centuries, *ulama* were the sole epistemic community with an unrivalled role in the production of knowledge in Iran. However, as the result of Iran's encountering Western philosophy, science, technology, and modernity, *ulama* lost its monopoly over the production of knowledge. By the late 1800s, Western concepts permeated the language of Shi'ism with subversive effects. While some wanted to stop this permeation and confront the West, others wanted to adapt to it and reform Shi'ism.<sup>22</sup> In other words, even the discourse of Shi'ism, which had not changed its narrative for centuries, began to change, although inadvertently.

Constitutive of these changes was the revival of a methodological debate among Shi'i scholars. The debate created two new schools of Shi'i thought—*Akhbaris* and *Ussulis*. *Akhbaris* (literalists or textualists) relied on the literal meaning of *Qur'an*, *Hadith*, and other holy texts. Literalists understood Islamic texts as divine, perfect, and immutable. In contrast, *Ussulis* (principlists or interpretivists) insisted that the Islamic Holy Texts are living documents and their meanings should correspond to the necessities of the time (*moqtaziat-e zaman*). In this debate, while the former would encourage a fixed reading of Islamic texts, the latter privileged an interpretive approach to the understanding of Islam. Although by the mid-1800s, *Ussulis* had won this debate, the traces of these two methodological schools remained in the political debate among Shi'i scholars. For Shi'i literalists, all aspects from the West had a corruptive effect on

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<sup>22</sup> For a reformist view of Islam, see Mehdi Ansari, *Sheikh Fazlollah Nouri Va Mashrotiat; Rodaryi-E Du Andisheh (Sheikh Fazlollah Nouri and the Constitution; Confrontation of Two Thoughts)* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Amir Kabir, 1997/1376).

For a confrontationalist view, see Roxanne Leslie Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 97.

the Islamic way of life, so they rejected the West as a whole and suggested a return to an Islamic Self. However, others argued that for the Islamic Self to survive, it had to rationally adapt itself according to the necessities of time, that is, to learn Western philosophy, science, technology, and governance. A prime example of an Islamic reformist was Sayed Jamal Afghani whose main argument was that “the decay of the Muslim *umma* (community) and its manifest weakness in relation to European ascendance are inextricably tied to the neglect of science and philosophy.”<sup>23</sup>

In sum, the Tobacco Uprising represented a turning point when traditional discourse of monarchic absolutism began to fall apart, and the values embedded in the political discourse of monarchic absolutism, which had not been contested for centuries, began to be opposed. In other words, what were previously valued became devalued, and concepts that did not previously exist in the language entered the language. In the next section, I will examine these new concepts as they entered into the language during the 1906 constitutional revolution.

### **The 1906 Constitutional Movement**

By the constitutional revolution of 1906, the discourse of monarchic absolutism had totally collapsed. By then, even the king, ministers, and many others in the court devalued the old order and valued a new law-based political order similar to those of European governments. Law became the basic signifier of the discourse constitutionalism and the state adopted it. Majority of the clergy, the state-elites in and out of the court, merchants, and urban masses constructed an alliance that became known as “constitutionalists.” For constitutionalists, law was supposed to provide security and order, develop and modernize the country, and determine state relations with itself and its surrounding world.

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<sup>23</sup> Ali Reza Kashi, *The Order and Trend of the Discourse of Democracy in Iran* (Tehran: Gam-e No, 2006/1385), pp. 46-52.

In 1906, constitutionalists succeeded in forcing Muzaffar al-Din Shah to sign a decree ordering the formation of a constitutional government (*houkumat-e Mashroteh*). The primary demand of everyone involved was the establishment of a lawful government. In other words, a particular formation of discourse succeeded in becoming the official state discourse and thus the official policies and practices of the state, at least for a few months.

In October 1906, the first national representative assembly (*Majlis Shoray-e-Melli*) opened and passed the first Fundamental Law of Iran. The Fundamental Law (*Qanun Assaasi*) quickly attempted to pass laws establishing a sovereign nation-state governed by laws. The *Majlis* quickly removed the principle of the shah's divine right of sovereignty and placed it with the representative assembly of the people in the *Majlis*. These policies and practices were constitutive of how law had entered into the language as the solution for the people's security from the abuses of power by the state-elites, as well as the essential component for promoting Islamic justice and societal development. Texts written during the constitutional revolution have consensus on the necessity for establishing a sovereign nation-state governed by laws (*Qanun*), that is, based on national interest derived from the general will of the nation led by the people's representatives.<sup>24</sup>

Accordingly, the constitution granted equal rights and freedom before the laws passed by the *Majlis*. It declared the Twelve Imami Shi'ism as the official religion, and appointed a body consisting of five grand Ayatollahs to assure that no laws passed by the *Majlis* would violate the

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<sup>24</sup> For example, *rooz nameh qanoon*, published by Mirza Malkum Khan in London. For a review of these publications, see Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*, pp. 25-84. For more information on the Constitutional movement in Iran, see Javad Sheikh-Islami, "Mohammad Ali Shah; Characteristics and Ending " *Political & Economic Ettela'at* 20, no. 227-230 (2006).

principles of Islamic laws.<sup>25</sup> The *Majlis* also established the first Iranian National Bank to begin an independent development of Iran. Relatedly, it tried to reestablish control over its customs and import-export taxation. It removed the right of the shah to enter into treaties, loan agreements, and other matters without the consent of the *Majlis*. It barred the shah from placing his close relatives in the cabinet and set budgetary limits on the court's expenditure. It created a secular judiciary branch and vested all legislative, investigative, and budgetary power with the *Majlis*. It also tried to pass a bill of rights the content of which became a contentious point between modernists and Islamists.<sup>26</sup> In other words, by signifying law as the basis of the state sovereignty, development, law, justice, and Islamic norms, constitutionalists attempted to build a modern nation-state. But as soon as constitutionalists established a law-based government, their shared vision of community collapsed, and it was not again reconstructed until 1921, which will be the subject of Chapter 3.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> During this era, another interpretation signified modernism more than law. Modernists published many anti-clerical essays and promoted laicism as if they were in the midst of an academic debate in an intellectual gathering in the West.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Among these papers were *Su-i Israfil* and *Habl al-Matin* who were very critical of even Islamic reformists.

<sup>27</sup> This section was partly informed by the following texts: Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 49-101.

Abraham Taymouri, "Iran before the Constitutional Revolution," *Political & Economic Ettela'at* 20, no. 227-230 (2006/1385): p. 11. Malek al-Shua'ra Bahar, *Tarikh-I Ahzab-I Siyasi-Yi Iran (History of Political Parties in Iran)* (Tehran: 1945).

Kashi, *The Order and Trend of the Discourse of Democracy in Iran*, pp. 46-52.

*Rooz nameh qanoon*, published by Mirza Malkum Khan in London. For a review of these publications, see Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*, pp. 25-84.

For Constitutional Movement in Iran, see Ansari, *Sheikh Fazlollah Nouri Va Mashrotiat; Rodaryi-E Du Andisheh (Sheikh Fazlollah Nouri and the Constitution; Confrontation of Two Thoughts)*.

Ahmad Kasravi, *Tarikhe Mashrotiate Iran (History of Iran's Constitution)* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1978/1357).

Mashallah Ajoudani, *Mashroteh Irani Va Nazaryeh Valayat-E Fagih (Iranian Constitutionalism; Backgrounds for the Theory of Guardianship of the Jurisprudent)* (London: Fasl-e Ketab Publication, 1997/1367).

Mashallah Ajodani, "Ejtema'eyon Amyon (Social Democrats)," *Political & Economic Ettela'at* 20, no. 227-230 (2006). Also Ahmad Roohul-Qudos, "Freedom " *Roohul-Qudos* Jamad al-Sani 1907.

At the time, Malek al-Shoara-ye Bahar, a radical democrat and famous poet, called for the revived unity that had brought the monarchic absolutism to its knees. In a nostalgic tone for the unifying ideals of the constitutional revolution whose origin was not far in the future, Bahar wrote:

Agreed, we did not, to the breaking of our own promises,  
To the losing of our own oneness,  
To the shattering of our own nation,  
And to the changing of our own minds.  
But agreed, we did,  
To the saving of our motherland for God's sake,  
To the unity of our own people for God's sake,  
And to the destroying of our own internal enemy for God's sake.<sup>28</sup>

Although the poet assumed the oneness of the “motherland,” the “nation,” and the “internal enemy” for all Iranians, no such oneness existed. Different imaginations of Iran had opposing notions of the “motherland,” the “nation,” and the “internal enemy.” These internal divisions turned to the loss of faith on the part of the people about the constitutional movement, and even the word “constitutionalism” (*mashroteh*) came to mean killing and looting rather than how it had been previously valued as the universal ideal for goodness. According to Katouzian, “Whenever anyone killed anyone and anywhere was looted, they said it was constitutionalised . . . (*beh mashroteh-ash resi*).<sup>29</sup>

When World War I broke out, Iran's internal division was exacerbated exponentially. Although Iran declared neutrality, it did not have the power to enforce it. Thus, it became the

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Hosein Bashiriyeh, *Mavanea Tosa'yea Syasi Dar Iran (Obstacles to Political Development in Iran)*, vol. 5 (Tehran: Gam-e No 2001).

Adamiyat, *Freedom and Thoughts and the Setting of Constitutional Movement (Fekr Aza'dy Va Moqademeh Yeh Neza't Moshroeya't)*. Mohammad Malekzadeh, *History of the Constitutional Revolution of Iran (Tarikh-E Inqila'b-E Mashrutiyyat-E Iran)*, 5 vols. (Tehran: Suqrat Press, 1949), v. 1, pp. 202-205.

<sup>28</sup> For the Farsi text, see Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*, p. 58.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

battleground between the Allied and Central Powers. Russia occupied the north; Britain occupied the south and began arming Bakhtiaries, Khamseh, and Arab tribes. The Ottomans invaded the north and forced the Russians out of Azerbaijan. They also moved into the northwest and began arming the Kurds who fought the British and their Arab tribal proxies at the time. The Germans began to arm and advise the Bluchies, Qashqaies, and Tangestanies tribes, who began fighting the British forces in the south. The pro-Germans members of the *Majlis* fled the capital and established a provisional government in Kermanshah in the northwest.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, the pro-Allied government remained in Tehran.<sup>31</sup> In other words, there were two governments and multiple fronts, and each front reflected an existing internal division exploited by external forces for their own interests.

In short, the previously high hope of establishing a constitutional government turned into despair. By 1918, the population was suffering from severe famine. At least one-quarter of the population in the north, which is the most fertile part of Iran, starved to death; there are no existing records of the effects of the food shortage on the rest of the country.<sup>32</sup> Reflecting the state of the country, words like chaos, anarchy, war, starvation, corruption, and occupation described the conditions of the country, and urgent calls for the restoration of order dominated the texts.

After the war ended, Britain blocked Iranian envoys to the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919. Simultaneously, the British Foreign Office Secretary in London, Lord Curzon, was pressing for an immediate passage of a mandate that would legally bring Iran under the formal control of Britain. He had approved the bribing of three key cabinet ministers in exchange for

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<sup>30</sup> William J. Olson, *Anglo-Iranian Relations During World War I* (London: F. Cass, 1984), pp. 45-46.

<sup>31</sup> Keddie and Richard, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, p. 75.

<sup>32</sup> Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*, pp. 91-116.

their help to lobby other legislatures.<sup>33</sup> By 1920, Curzon gave up his scheme, partly because Britain had even more of a problem in Iraq, which was under its mandate.<sup>34</sup> Then he wrote, “Persia is now paying the penalty for her own vacillation and folly, and, if she cannot extricate herself by the only legitimate means, namely by constitutional action of Majlis summoned for the purpose, no other expedient can save the situation.”<sup>35</sup> Suddenly, it appeared that Britain was the country that wanted to help install a constitutional government in Iran, but Iranians did not want it or could not handle it. These events had injurious effects on the emergence of Iranian nationalism, which had been born in the womb of colonialism, nurtured by internal division, and exploited by imperialist competition of Western powers.

For example, Aref-e Qazvini (1882-1934) created a literary genre at the time, which had a dark, racist, and xenophobic tone. Aref’s poems are imbued in the culture of Shi’is glorification of martyrdom, and his music and songs are pervaded by religious and mourning tunes. In a song that Hamid Dadbashi called “something of a national anthem for Iranian revolutionary nationalists at the purest and most noble moments of their idealism,” Aref wrote, “From the blood of young people of this nation tulips have grown/In mourning for the fallen figures, cypress is bended.”<sup>36</sup> While Aref depicted the British as rapists, criminals, thieves, and vampires, he represented the Germans in a positive light. Through hundreds of his songs and poems cited, sung, and acted, the image of dying for the ideology of an ambiguous Iranian nation has been burned into the collective conscious of Iranians. However, the glorification of dying for the

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<sup>33</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East*, 1st cloth ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), pp. 26-27.

<sup>34</sup> In 1920, Iraq was in revolt against British forces. In Egypt, as well as Palestine, British forces were under guerilla attacks. See Herman Norman, "British Documents on Foreign Policy " (1921), v. iii, no. 607.

<sup>35</sup> Dabashi, *Iran: A People Interrupted*, p. 103.

<sup>36</sup> Movasghi, *Modernization and Refrom in Iran; from Theory to Practice*, p. 203.



nation is usually articulated in relation to the struggle against foreign others (*khareji*). The foreign others are always represented as enemies inside working with foreigners outside of a presumably homogenous nation that has existed only in words but practiced in deeds.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I briefly described the specific historical condition that resulted in the collapse of the century-old official state discourse of the Iranian monarchic absolutism. I described how previously valued concepts were devalued, and new basic signifiers entered the language. While in the pre-modern discourse of monarchic absolutism, the shah, who was signified as the absolute provider of security for the Muslim-Iranian subjects, began to be represented as the cause of insecurity and the threat to the Islamic way life. The meaning of the shah as the security provider collapsed. Relatedly, the meaning of what was previously represented as a divine political order collapsed. Meanwhile, four new signifiers gradually entered the language. Together with traditional signifiers, the new signifiers began to construct competing imaginations of Iran, which I have called “contending discourses,” each with a different image of an ideal nation-state that is secure, developed, lawful, democratic, class-just, and Islamic.

I reviewed the Tobacco Uprising, which was the first urban-based mass movement that shared a vision of a national community united against the shah and against Britain. In 1906, that shared vision formed a unity among constitutionalists who wanted to establish a law-based government. Soon after the establishment of the first Iranian constitutional government, the extreme internal division, exacerbated by the occupation of foreign powers, forced the country into civil, local, and tribal conflicts, which ended only when Reza Khan’s British-backed coup resulted in establishing the first modern state Iran. In Chapter 3, I will explain the formation of Reza Khan’s imagination of building a modern nation-state.

## CHAPTER 3 THE DISCOURSE OF MODERN ABSOLUTISM (1922-1941)

### Introduction

As explained in the previous two chapters, Iran's encountering the West produced new collective imaginations, which I have called "political discourses," and if one discourse is adopted by the state, I have called it the "official state discourse." In Chapters 1 and 2, I demonstrated that Iran's encounter with the West caused the collapse of the discourse of Iranian absolute monarchism (*Saltanat-e Motlaq-e*) in which the state (*houkumat*) was represented as a divine political order bestowed upon kings. Accordingly, God was regarded as the absolute sovereign, and kings were considered God's authoritative delegates, thus the absolute sovereigns on earth. Texts represented the absolutist political order of kings as a divine design for maintaining public interest (*maslahat umomi*) by providing order and security and preventing chaos and conflict, which was also consistent with the interest of the Islamic community or nation (*maslahat umat-e Islam*) at large. In other words, the legitimacy of the sovereign was inseparably linked to the ability of kings to maintain an absolutist political order and provide security. In Chapter 2, I showed that for many centuries, rural, urban, religious, and tribal authorities simply acquiesced and adhered to this practice. Relatedly, since the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722), Shi'i clerical authorities, for the most part, reinforced the legitimacy of this political order.

In Chapter 2, I examined the rise and fall the 1906 Constitutional Revolution, which marked the first time that law became the basic signifier that permeated the meanings of state building, nation imagining, and foreign policymaking. For example, building a constitutional state was conceptually linked to modernizing, civilizing, and developing the nation. Imagining the nation was linked to instituting legal, rational, and administrative norms consistent with

Islam, class, and the people's local interests. However, during the 1906 Constitutional Revolution, the battle between the old and new political order continued. On the one hand, constitutionalists signified the primacy of law in establishing a legal, modern, class-just, and sovereign political order. On the other hand, monarchists signified the primacy of security in order to modernize the country without creating chaos, to maintain Islamic laws and traditions, to prevent class warfare, to prevent revolution, and to protect the national interest by creating a balance between Russia and Britain. Modernization *vis-à-vis* absolutism was the Japanese model that interested Iranians. Whereas constitutionalists imagined a parliamentary political model, monarchists imagined a Japanese or German model. Nevertheless, by the 1920s, constitutionalism failed and so did the state. Because of rampant insecurity, chaos, famine, civil war, occupation, and tribal conflicts, the primacy of providing security once again became the defining signifier for the state. I call this political discourse “modern absolutism.”

I call it “modern” because the state began to signify and treat modernization projects as historical missions. I also call it “absolutism” because the shah eventually personified the state and essentially became the absolute sovereign over all aspects of social, political, and economic life. Thus, the motto for Reza Shah's state-building project began with restoration of security (*amniat*) to the country.

Once modern absolutism became the state official discourse, it began to permeate the meanings of other signifiers—political order, modernization, law, people, class, and Islam. First, the state wanted to modernize, centralize, militarize, and bureaucratize. This representation meant valuing a particular understanding of modernization and devaluing traditional mechanisms of governance. Second, the state signifiers—security and development—permeated the meaning of “people” of Iran and constructed an official nationalism. Third, the state permeated the

meaning of Islamic myths. The state began to represent Islam as traditional, local, and not originating in Persian myths, therefore antithetical to the discourse of absolute modernism. Fourth, the state represented itself as the absolute law unto itself. Thus, the state attempted to eliminate local, tribal, and religious customary laws. Representing the state as law unto itself made rules under modern absolutism even more arbitrary than under the personalistic rules of ancient regimes. Additionally, the concept of a constitutional state became a performative instrument of reinforcing the absolutism of the shah and the state fused into one. Fifth, the state represented and understood class-based identities as anti-Iranian and pro-communism. Sixth, the state aligned itself with the West against the socialist East. This chapter will examine how the state began to build a modern state, to construct an official nationalism, and to make relations with other states constitutive of political discourse.

### **Establishment of a Modern Absolutist State**

Constitutive of the political discourse of modern absolutism was the desire for the restoration of order and security (*nazm va amniat*). By the 1920s, the meaning of a political order (a sovereign order) was attached to the building of a strong and centralized state that could provide order and security for the nation. In other words, order and security permeated the meanings and practices of constitutionalism, which had resulted in utter chaos and insecurity for the country from 1907-1921. Hence, the motto for Reza Shah's state-building project began with restoration of security (*amniat*) to the country.

The restoration of order and security by the state became the primary signifier of the official state discourse. Modern absolutists, or "modernists" for short, built an absolutist state, which was equipped with a well-disciplined military that enforced its order and its official nationalism. Modernists also built a modern bureaucracy to administer the state developmental projects, and they instituted a judicial system to enforce the state official identity. During this

transformation, modernists destroyed local or traditional structures of authority, administration, common law, and customs. In the next few sections, I will examine texts that illustrate how modernists forged a great transformation by destroying traditional, local, and religious mechanisms of governance. Instead, modernists began to govern based on what they understood as Western models, which were represented and understood as progressive, efficacious, and legitimate.

Based on these practices, modernists adopted an eclectic set of governing templates modeled after various Western experiences. For example, the military was first modeled after the British and later after the German system. The gendarmerie (the rural police) was modeled after the French provincial police. The state bureaucracy was modeled after the Germans, and the judicial system was adopted from French legal codes. Meanwhile, the prison system was administered according to Swiss codes, the educational system was copied from the French school system, and the Treasury Department was designed after the American system. In these transformative adoptions, the key concern was the destruction of the traditional mechanisms of governance because they were understood to be backward and thus illegitimate. But all models of mimicking Western governance were viewed as signs of progress and therefore legitimate. In other words, the justification for measuring the legitimacy of governance was not an objective or tangible fact outside of the language. But the justification was indeed shaped by the very representation of what was considered “modern” or “traditional.” In other words, the legitimacy of modernization was counterpoised to traditionalism, localism, tribalism, and decentralism.

While modernization was understood in terms of its oppositional differences with traditionalism, localism, tribalism, and Shi’ism, the establishment of an absolutist order was understood in terms of its oppositional differences with chaos, insecurity, underdevelopment,

class warfare, religious backwardness, foreign occupation, and intervention. Accordingly, absolutism was valued and legitimized. Hence, violence, coercion, and fear were valued as necessary means to establish order. But the use of dialogue, compromise, negotiation, and consensus building was devalued as signs of the state's weakness. The use of violence, coercion, and fear was in sharp contrast to the Weberian concept of legitimate authority, which presupposes the least possible use of coercion and violence as signs of modern legitimacy. During Reza Shah's modern absolutism, the frequent use of coercion and violence was represented as the absolutist authority of Reza Shah. From this perspective, the building of a modern military, police, gendarmerie, and bureaucracy were understood as instruments of establishing an absolutist control over all aspects of social life rather than legitimizing institutions. In other words, the use of violence or coercion was legalized, regularized, bureaucratized, and normalized. Violence and coercion remained as a legitimate instrument of maintaining and securing the state. In fact, Reza Shah fell from power as soon as the collective fear for the regime disappeared and the legitimacy of the use of force became illegitimate. In the next few sections, I will examine how modern absolutism represented, understood, and practiced the building of the state, the imagining of the nation, and conducting relations with foreign powers.

### **Militarizing and Bureaucratizing the State**

In this era, the military grew from 40,000 men to a force of 127,000 well-disciplined troops, controlled by a hierarchic command structure. The army consumed "thirty-three percent of the annual budget."<sup>1</sup> To expand the manpower pool, Reza Shah instituted a mandatory conscription for all 18-year-old males. Islamists protested this move, but they were no longer any

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<sup>1</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 136. Also see Hussein Makki, *Tarikhecheh Jebhaya Melli (a Short History of the National Front)* (Tehran: 1954), pp. 109-113.

match for Reza Shah's regime. He established a military school for officer training in Iran and sent officers to France and Germany for additional military training. Besides the army, Reza Shah established a small airforce and navy. In short, the military became the primary pillar of the state-building project, and high-ranking military officers gradually became the most powerful among the state-elites.

Equipped with the coercive means of violence, Reza Shah instituted a modern bureaucratic apparatus armed with legal codes and procedures. His bureaucracy modernized governance by trying to destroy all forms of traditional governance, which was founded on familial, communal, and consensus. In this modern and bureaucratically-administered governance, the technology of creating and enforcing rule, order, control, discipline, and punishment differed in three fundamental ways.

First, the reach of a brutal bureaucracy extended to the remotest part of the country. The people as well as bureaucrats obeyed rules, and violators received harsh punishment. For example, the state dictated migratory routes, force-settled some tribes, and replaced local and religious authorities with bureaucratic ones. These measures extended the reach of the central government beyond what any previous state in Iran had ever done. During this era, governance was indeed systematic, centralized, and bureaucratized. Governance was also more brutal, intrusive, and arbitrary than ever before because the system was constructed on insecurity. Fear was represented and understood as an inevitable but necessary evil for governing. Hussein Makki cited an occasion when Reza Shah ordered his chief of police, General Ayram, to find the anonymous writer of an offensive letter. In a verbal account to Ali-Akbar Davar, the head of the Judiciary, Ayram boastfully accounted for the bureaucratic procedures he had followed to take the offender's confession of that "heinous" crime in one day. After Ayram finished his report and

left, Davar regretfully confided to his friend about the unknowable plight of those innocent people whom the chief of police had falsely accused to take over their lands and simultaneously make himself appear indispensable to the shah.<sup>2</sup> In this representation, it is obvious that fear was understood as an inevitable part of social reality. The shah feared a letter supposedly written by social enemies; the chief of police feared the shah; the accused feared the state and even confessed to crimes they did not commit; and the chief justice of the country feared the system he had helped create. Moreover, the arbitrariness of rule is concomitant with the strict adherence to bureaucratic procedures.<sup>3</sup>

Second, governance was rule-based, but rule making was as arbitrary as ever. Ervand Abrahamian states:

[F]ew executions were carried out in these years for the simple reason that violent crime rapidly diminished once the state established control over the highways and stamped out rural banditry. . . . For the first time in history, the state was armed with the full machinery of modern government—a central bureaucracy, a standing army, and a national police force. In short, it had the Maxim gun and thus could dispense with the public gallows . . . . The modern prison had come to Iran via the modified and more humanitarian systems of early-twentieth-century Western Europe. Like much else in Pahlavi architecture, ancient Iranian motives were grafted onto the building to give it an "authentic" look. The Western penitentiary had been Iranianized.<sup>4</sup>

A Swiss administrator operated the prison system more or less according to European models and based on legislatively passed rules and procedures, but the shah decided to violate the rules. He could easily do so by ordering the rules to be tailored to his liking. In other words, although governance became ruled-based, modern, and bureaucratic, the rule-making remained as

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<sup>2</sup> Ervand Abrahamian and NetLibrary Inc., *Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 26-27.

<sup>3</sup> In a trip to Firouz Abbad, in the middle of the Qashqaye tribal territory, I encountered an old grave dating to Reza Shah's reign. According to local residents, the grave belonged to a state-hired engineer who had failed a road inspection. The engineer was allegedly placed under the tire of a military truck and run over. While this particular story might be exaggerated or even false, the perception of Reza Shah as a strict enforcer of rules has become mythical. Reza Shah, of course, was proud of his reputation.

<sup>4</sup> Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*, p. 317.



arbitrary, personal, and absolutist as during the period of monarchic absolutism. According to Taqizadeh, Reza Shah's favorite phrase was "I destroy you." He used these three words when he decided to eliminate many of his once loyal ministers, bureaucrats, and tribal chiefs.<sup>5</sup>

Third, rules and procedures of governance were embedded neither in the social fabric of the society nor in accordance with the existing social norms. Thus, rules and procedures of governance were not understood and practiced because the state feared them. On the contrary, in the traditional mode of governance rules, procedures, punishment, and mediations were all social and local norms and thus understood and practiced accordingly. In other words, in the rush to modernize and centralize the country, the state adopted rules and procedures modeled after European countries but with total contempt for all existing social and local norms and practices. As a result, for a great majority of people, modern rules and procedures were obscure and hard to follow.

As if the incompatibility of social and local norms and practices with imported rules and procedures was not enough, the inefficiencies of bureaucracy made sure that bureaucratic rules and procedures remained without any mediating mechanisms. At least in the traditional governance, many layers of mediation were in place for rule violators. For example, accused violators of rules could seek holy sanctuaries, at least temporarily, to provide a cooling-off period. In some cases, the family of an accused would solicit respected elders to lobby on the accused's behalf. In other cases, respected clerks would provide a level of protection from the state. On the contrary, for an overwhelming majority of the people, no legal path existed to mitigate, mediate, or appeal false convictions, bureaucratic mistakes, and intended and unintended abuses of rules. Hence, the birth of the first modern state in Iran was concomitant

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<sup>5</sup> Bashiriyeh, *Mavanea Tosa'yea Syasi Dar Iran (Obstacles to Political Development in Iran)*, Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*.

with the destruction of locally-based norms and rules and the construction of a disembedded state from the society.<sup>6</sup>

In short, during this era, Reza Shah established a sovereign absolutist state. Equipped with military and bureaucracy, the state extended its reach into the remotest section of the country. Although governance was rule-based, rule-making remained arbitrary. Additionally, for a great majority of the people, the bureaucratized, centralized, and European-based rules and procedures were too obscure and without mediating mechanisms to soften their arbitrariness.

### **Dominating the Polity**

Constitutive of the political discourse of modern absolutism was the drive to purify the political system from all other contending discourses. In this transformation, modernists led by Reza Shah monopolized the political system. The *Majlis* abandoned its previous role of representing the people and adopted the role of representing the will of the shah, who had become the embodiment of the state. The *Majlis* gave up its plural identity and adopted a singular identity with a unified voice that reflected that of Reza Shah. The *Majlis* changed from choosing the cabinets and running the government to merely receiving and conducting orders from the cabinet selected by the shah. In this transformative process of creating an absolutist state, parties were banned and their leaders were deported, imprisoned, or killed.

Gradually and methodically, the state banned all modern forms of freedom of expression as they had been practiced since the 1906 Constitutional Revolution—the press, trade unions, strikes, protests, assemblies, political parties, and so forth. The state also destroyed traditional

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<sup>6</sup> Most scholars argue that because of the arbitrariness of personalistic rule in Iran, the state has always been disembedded from society. For example, see Movasghi, *Modernization and Reform in Iran; from Theory to Practice*. Alamdari, *Why Iran Lagged Behind and the West Moved Forward*. Hosain Makki, *Tarikh-E Bist Saleh-E Iran (History of Twenty Years)* 8vols. (Tehran Nashre Nasher, 1945/1324), v. 6, p. 375. This argument, however, assumes that there was always a centralized, controlling, and dominating state in Iran. However, evidence shows that the traditional state in Iran was very weak and decentralized.

political authorities. By harsh and coercive measures, the state discouraged tribal and nomadic lifestyles. For example, the gendarmerie restricted access to, and the movement across, the traditionally recognized tribal territories. It expropriated many tribal lands. Reza Shah also killed or deported tribal chiefs who were not completely co-opted. In some cases, even some of those who were co-opted were killed after they could no longer fit into the state's modernization projects.

The state also changed the structure of traditional authorities in rural areas.<sup>7</sup> Landowners, or in some cases the gendarmerie, appointed local authorities without the consensus of the locals. Moreover, the state ordered the privatization and expropriation of previously held communal properties. In these processes, large landholders, with access to the newly instituted State Registrar Offices, could and did register their holdings under their names. But local and small landowners, who were unfamiliar with the required legal formalities, lost legal rights to their land. In short, the state monopolized all political powers to the fullest extent possible. With this transformation, other contending political discourses, which had become united by the signification of security, began to become a part of the opposition to the state.

### **Commanding the Economy**

In addition to the monopolization of political power, the state-elites also monopolized the economic resources. During this era, property relations changed in favor of a new breed of large landholders whose acquired properties were the result of their military rankings, bureaucratic positions, or court patronages. No traditional landholders survived this transformation except those directly associated with the state. With an estimated holding of 15% of Iran's arable lands, Reza Shah, by far, became the largest landholder in Iran. Additionally, Reza Shah appropriated

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<sup>7</sup> For the structure of traditional authority, see Chapter 4.

some of the most lucrative monopolies in the country. The shah's wealth, combined with the wealth of a relatively small number of landed military and state-elites constituted the largest portion of private wealth in the country. As though monopolization of private wealth—to the extent that was possible or profitable—was not enough, the state began to control a substantial portion of economic production. This monopoly of wealth and power gave the ruling elites, led by the Pahlavis, unprecedented economic wealth and control. Accordingly, in a very short period, the state monopolized all means of coercive, administrative, political, and economic power. With the power and institutions of the state, Reza Shah went on to his state-building projects according to how modern absolutism represented and understood development.

### **Development and Modern Absolutism**

Modernizing (*tosea*) was one of the constituting signifiers for the political discourse of absolute modernism. Identifying with modernism was the desire to develop, progress, and civilize (*Tosea, Taraqi, and Tamadon*) Iran according to an evolutionary image of a history in which the West led the way and Iran was forced to catch up along the same path. This evolutionary image of history was understood as natural and universal. Hossian Maki's eight-volume history book, *Tarikh-e Bist Saleh (The History of Twenty Years 1921-1941)*, details Reza Shah's period, presupposing the naturalness of the "law of development and growth." In one of many implicit and explicit references to "this law," Maki wrote:

One of the most fixed laws of nature is the law of growth and evolution. All things in the universe, from material things to human beings and from microscopic creatures to planets and stars always and without interruption are progressing forward and incrementally evolving. Human societies, which are a part of the nature, follow this fixed law.<sup>8</sup>

However, all contending discourses shared this understanding of progressive history, but each with a different interpretation.

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<sup>8</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 148.

For modernists, the interrelated levels of economic, political, and cultural development determined the level of civilization or lack thereof. At the level of the economy, the criteria for measuring economic development were the scales of bureaucratization, industrialization, privatization, and capital accumulation. At the level of policymaking, the measuring rods for political development were the size, power, and control of the state. At the level of society, the criteria for measuring social development were the extent to which Iran looked Western-like.

### **Understanding Economic Development**

At the economic level, the scale of projects and the role of the state were the criteria for measuring development. Accordingly, large-scale, state-led, and foreign investments were considered efficient, productive, and modern, but small-scale businesses were understood as inefficient, unproductive, and local. Doing business on a large-scale basis meant that the state's role in the economy changed from a previously non-interventionist and/or non-existent policy to an intervention economic restructuring. As the revenue collection from oil, tariffs, royalties, state monopolies, and deficit spending increased, the state's ability to enter into grand developmental projects toward infrastructural and industrial building projects was enhanced.<sup>9</sup> The state began to build the trans-Iranian railways, roads, the National Bank of Iran, factories, the University of Tehran, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Health, and many more modernizing projects. Additionally, state-owned companies operated utilities, financial cooperatives, trades, and a host of institutional mechanisms that provided 20<sup>th</sup> century amenities and regulated the daily lives of Iranians.<sup>10</sup> This modernism transformed the state into the largest investor, producer, consumer, educator, and employer in the country.

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<sup>9</sup> Mohammed Amjad, *Iran: From Royal Dictatorship to Theocracy*, Contributions in Political Science, No. 242 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), p. 97.

<sup>10</sup> For more information on these modernization projects, see Sirus Ghani, *Iran and the Rise of Reza Shah: From Qajar Collapse to Pahlavi Rule* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998), p. 295.

Ali-Akbar Davar, perhaps one of the most important advocates of modern absolutism, insisted upon economic development as the solution to Iran's main problem—underdevelopment (*aqab oftadegi*). The following passage is an excerpt from Davar's writings:

The contemporary Western civilization is the result of the Industrial Revolution . . . and the West is not stronger or superior because it has more intellectuals, schools, libraries, and scientists; all these are branches, leaves, and fruits of the Western civilization. The root cause of the superiority of the civilization of others [the West] is their railroads . . . as long as they [the West] worked with their hands as we did, and carried loads with horses as we did, their lives were not that much different from ours. But from the moment Europe drove on rails and began to control the nature while our nation kept on riding donkeys, Iran was destined to live in destitution. While the industrial revolution was taking place, we [Iranians] were living in a world of sleep-like ignorance. . . . Then when we woke up, we saw two uninvited European giants on either side of our bed . . . Although we recognized the intrusion, we did nothing. Now that we have a few years of experience before us, now that we have seen how Britain and Russia have carved up Iran into their spheres of influence and have forced us to abject poverty once again. . . . [How can we change?]. . . . What did Japan do forty years ago? Did they resort to poetry? Did they use their prayer beads to develop their country? Did they curse their rulers and shout that foreigners stop them from developing their country? No, they built a railway system, they opened up schools and universities, hospitals . . . and as long as we refuse to dedicate ourselves to an economic revolution, as the Japanese have done, we will move or change nothing. We will remain as a submissive nation of disaster-stricken, starved, and tattered cloaked beggars, we continue suffering even more as time goes on. While it is true that we have six-thousand years of history, we cannot exchange that history for factories, railroads, hospitals, and schools.<sup>11</sup>

For Davar, who represented a great majority of the state-elites at the time, state-led developmental projects meant the difference between becoming Western or non-Western. Developmental projects, without the absolute power of the state, appeared impossible for Davar. He wrote:

For Iran, the establishing of an absolutist state is a patriotic mission by which, as logic dictates, a strong-willed and competent leader must lead this nation to its desired destiny [development]. The leader must impose upon the nation what is good for them, and must do what is necessary even if he has to use the force of whips.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Bashiriyeh, *Mavanea Tosa'yea Syasi Dar Iran (Obstacles to Political Development in Iran)*, p. 72.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.

In these representations—analogueous to Marxist-Leninist vanguards who assumed for themselves the burden of pushing history forward to a certain desired destiny—Davar also wanted to push the nation forward to a certain desired destiny. The problem was that the desired destiny was not for the majority of the people, but for the state-elites.

The “desired destiny”—development—was represented as a patriotic mission, and its achievement was represented as the absolutism of the state. Hence, the state-led developmental projects were understood in terms of patriotic and historical missions that differentiated Iran from its underdeveloped, traditional, rural, primitive, savage, non-Western-like opposite. Even the way the state produced statistics reflected these representations and constructions. For example, statistical indicators that referred to the levels of industrialization, urbanization, bureaucratization, large capital investments, global trades, and the scale of the state intervening powers were represented and understood as signs of development and progress. In contrast, indicators that referred to agriculture, peasantry, tribes, small capitalists, merchant capitalists, small-scale enterprises, and traditional merchants (*bazzaaris*) were understood as the shameful signs of underdevelopment and traditional economy—and thus devalued.<sup>13</sup>

As such, understanding development, led the state to pursue projects on a grand scale. By far, one of the grandest of all the state projects was the Iranian Railway System. According to Homa Katouzian, a well-known expert in the economic history of Iran, the scale of investment in the railway system, as well as some other of Reza Shah’s modernizing projects, did not justify its actual or potential benefits to the country.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the actual and potential benefits did not match, as Katouzian argued, the allocation of the national resources to the project. He concluded

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<sup>13</sup> Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979*, p. 79.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

that economic projects pursued during Reza Shah's era were more about showing off the construction of factories than the actual benefits received from their operation.<sup>15</sup> He wrote: "Based on available documents, it is evident that the economic policies during Reza Shah's era resulted in expensive large-scale projects with low returns. This resulted in the wasting of national resources."<sup>16</sup>

### **Understanding Political Development**

The criterion for measuring political development was the scale and extent of state control over the means of production, distribution, and consumption. Thus, the concentration of all military, economic, and political power to the state, which was controlled by military and bureaucratic elites, was represented and understood as political development. This way, the state became the epicenter of all powers and institutions. It offered the most "lucrative posts, favors, and futures to those willing to serve it."<sup>17</sup> The state enhanced the lives of those willing to submit to it, but it deprived those who could not or did not submit to it. The state provided some modern amenities to its urban citizens, but deprived its rural and tribal citizens.

In other words, to provide or deprive services, to invest or divest, and to facilitate or inhibit economic activities by the state's bureaucratic regulations were not neutral economic decisions. They were value-laden political decisions, which were constitutive of how and what the state understood as legitimate services, good investments, and useful economic activities. Accordingly, the absolutist power of the state was valued as a developmental necessity. Thus, providing and investing in military personnel and bureaucracy were valued, as was providing and investing in Western-oriented research and developmental and educational projects. As expected,

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>16</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 137.

<sup>17</sup> Ahmad Kasravi, *Zendegani Man (My Life)* (Tehran Bonyad 1944), p. 256.



those who worked for the state were among the highest paid and highly esteemed sector of the society, and almost all high-ranking state officials had a Western education.

Conversely, the state deprived rural areas and small cities from state services. The state divested itself from small-businesses, artisan production, the merchant class, and agriculture. Also, the state inhibited tribal, nomadic, local, and traditional productions. These political decisions reflected how the state understood what constituted modern development versus traditional and thus underdevelopment (*aqab oftadegi*). Relatedly, those who worked in traditional productions found themselves with lower earnings and disadvantaged social statuses, that is, in contrast to those who worked for the state and had a Western education. Understanding development as such created many dichotomies, for example, urban-rural development.

In the representation of urban-rural relations, those who lived in Tehran were represented and understood as more educated, civilized, urbanized, and modernized than those who lived in rural areas. But a new meaning was attached to “locality.” In the past, those who lived in villages and cities identified with their localities as their countries (*Vatan*). In other words, local identities did not mean the stage of one’s development, education, or civilization. However, gradually this construction entered the language and has remained as part of the language ever since. For example, in the construction of an urban-rural hierarchy, words such as a “villager” (*Dewhati*) lost its previously neutral meaning and became a pejorative term that represented a negative image of a crude, uncivilized, uneducated, and base person—an insult that plagues the language even today. In another example, the word *a’malea*, which literally means a “worker,” was previously a neutral word, but it became associated with villagers working in the growing construction projects in Tehran and became a denigrating and offensive word. To be politically correct, in recent decades, construction workers are referred to by the literal description of their

jobs since no noun has yet been coined that avoids the negative connotation of being a construction worker.

Similarly, in the hierarchic construction of urban-rural relations, people living in cities other than Tehran were categorized as *Shahrestanis* (non-Tehranis). Although not as negatively loaded as that of *Dewhati*, the word is pejorative, and the connotation remains in the language today.

### **Understanding Social Development**

At the societal level, the sole criterion for measuring social development was the level of Westernization, which meant taking on a Western appearance—most of the time in form but not in content. Accordingly, the state represented Western education, Western lifestyles, and instrumental rationality as social development. However, the state represented and understood traditional education, lifestyle, spirituality, faith, religion, local customs, and local norms and practices as social underdevelopment or backwardness regardless of their substance or lack of substance.

In the attempt to appear Western, the state focused on the project of transforming traditional ways to “modern” practices. Equipped with the administrative, coercive, political, and economic powers, the state prohibited the practicing of religious rituals, gatherings, and ceremonies. It banned Sharia laws, took away traditional clothes, and eliminated the role of clergy as judges. Most significantly, the state began to replace the clergy, who up to then administered various religious endowments (*Vagf*). As a result, the clergy benefited from an autonomous source of income for various Shi’ite institutions. For example, the largest property holder in Khurasan was—and still is—the Immam Reza endowment in Meshhad.

Whereas the building of the Iranian Railway System symbolized a grand economic development, abolishing Shari laws symbolized the most significant social development. As a

result, the Ministry of Justice, headed by Ali-Akbar Davar, a Swiss-educated lawyer, banned the practicing of the then common laws—Sharia laws. In its place, Davar adopted the French civil, criminal, and procedural codes, which, according to Kasravi, Davar referred to as “world-like laws” (*Qanoon-e Donya Pasand*) as opposed to Iranian-like laws. For Davar, however, the world-like laws actually meant Western laws.<sup>18</sup> But for most Iranians, these laws were alien, obscure, and, in many cases, incomprehensible. The rules were difficult, if not impossible, to follow in two ways. First, the people did not understand the rules because they were not compatible with their social practices and norms. Second, the state did not provide mediating mechanisms that could protect people from arbitrariness of its rules. As an example, for many centuries, state authorities had recognized the sanctuaries of certain holy shrines where people would seek a temporary reprieve from the arbitrariness of traditional rules. The state suddenly stopped this practice, but it did not simultaneously provide alternative mediating mechanisms.

The state-led social transformation, however, went far beyond the mimicking of Western-based laws and procedures; it extended into the state dictating clothing attire. Until 1928, the majority of male adults in urban areas—clergy and non-clergy alike—wore a variety of frocks (*Abba*), cummerbunds (shawls), and different headgear. Although the state had not officially attached Western-Eastern meaning to clothes, modernists had. Most modernists wore Western clothes, and Iranians associated the wearing of Western clothing with modernists. In his memoir, Kasravi wrote of an occasion in March 1927 when he had gone to Davar for a job in the newly instituted Ministry of Justice. Following the social norms of the day, Kasravi had worn his *Abba*, (shawl) and *ammameh* (turban).<sup>19</sup> In the job interview, according to Kasravi, “Davar bluntly told

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 255.

me, ‘I have a job for you, but it cannot be done with a turban.’ I responded, ‘I have no particular attachment to my turban, sir.’ Then Davar nodded approvingly and said, ‘If that is the case, get rid of the turban and then take a picture of yourself and send it to me.’ I responded, ‘I will.’”<sup>20</sup> In other words, even before Reza Shah ordered people to wear Western clothes, state officials identifying with absolute modernism unofficially imposed Western-style clothes on the state’s employees. However, as the state became more powerful, so did the attempt to make the nation uniformly Western in appearance.

In 1928, while the state banned the wearing of traditional and ethnic clothes for adult males, it ordered them to wear Western-styled clothes and a particular type of hat, known as a “Pahlavi cap” because Reza Shah wore one. The only conditional exemption to this edict applied to the clergy; they had to obtain a permit from the state if they chose to wear their traditional clothes. Supposedly, with this act, the state wanted to make the nation appear modern.

In 1934, in what Reza Shah’s sycophants termed as the “Emancipation of Women,” Reza Shah outlawed the wearing of veils in public or any head-cover except the then fashionable European hats. The police were also ordered to enforce the law. According to Mahmood Jam, the prime minister at that time, the shah had ordered the state’s high-ranking officials to attend a public gathering with their wives—unveiled for the first time in their lives. After the official speech, the shah consoled Jam for the unfashionable ways some women had attended. He then commented, “They [women] will gradually learn how to follow fashions and wear pretty dresses. Now that we have broken their prison bars, they must use their freedom to build a beautiful house instead of a prison for themselves.”<sup>21</sup> Of course, the first two pseudo fashion models for

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<sup>20</sup> Makki, *Tarikh-E Bist Saleh-E Iran (History of Twenty Years)* v.6, p. 267.

<sup>21</sup> Mahmood Jam’s Memoir in, *Ibid.*

Iranians were Reza Shah's own daughters—Princesses Shams and Ashraf—whose public attendances and pictures set the tone for what was then considered fashionable. During Mohammad Reza Shah's rule, his three different wives took on the job of being the most fashionable models. Of course, none of them ever wore colorful clothes that, at the time, the majority of rural and tribal women wore. Ironically, Iran, which had not become a formal colony, lost a rich and colorful variety in its local cloths. India, which was a formal British colony, did not lose its local and traditional cloths to the same extent that Iran did.

Additionally, Reza Shah ordered high-ranking state officials, military personnel, and bureaucrats to take their wives to public ceremonies and gatherings. In short, in the name of the “Emancipation of Women,” the unveiling of women became another symbolic representation of the West. The unveiling of was, however, a new representation and thus it produced many new meanings.

Traditionally, the covering of women's bodies from the public eye was associated with social statuses of women rather than religious ethics. Women with the highest social status refrained from showing up in public. When in public, men of lower social status would have to look down or away out of respect for these women. Public streets would be cleared in advance for the women of the court. Nevertheless, for the overwhelming majority of the population living in major cities and towns, these pretentious social ethics were luxuries unavailable and unaffordable. Moreover, almost all rural and tribal women, who at the time constituted the overwhelming majority of the female population, wore their own local clothes, which was not at all uniform or Islamic. In any event, until then, women went about their lives as they had done for thousands of years, bound by their communal social norms—just as men were bound by these norms. Because of Reza Shah's edict, urban women with the lowest social status were hurt more

than those who could either afford to buy the relatively expensive hats (which were not manufactured in Iran at that time) or stay home and be served by others. At the time, most cities did not have running water, hence, women gathered around the nearest local water sources, usually a small stream running through each neighborhood, to do their washing. Additionally, women were responsible for carrying drinking water from local water houses (*Aab Anba'r*), usually in open containers on their heads. Women were also in charge of preparing food, which had to be purchased, gathered, and picked from various local sources on a daily basis. Therefore, those who could least afford Reza Shah's fantasy of Westernization—vis-à-vis clothes—had to bear the heaviest burden. Under those conditions, women were expected to wear fancy European clothes and hats, as the state imagined, while carrying water buckets over their head or washing children's dirty clothes or cleaning pots and pans on the side of local water streams. The state played a cruel joke on Iranian women. Interestingly, Reza Shah's fantasy of Westernization, as seen by its clothing, was the result of his trip to Turkey, where, at the time, Atatürk was also in the process of modernizing his countrymen's clothing. Reza Shah's policy of Westernization, however, collapsed with his regime. What has remained of his regime is how meanings have been attached to clothing. From then on, how an individual dresses can offer much information about his political or religious identity. Thus, while the state intended to make all Iranians look uniformly Western, the result was that it instead infused religion into politics and clothing. In other words, even clothing became a political statement.

In 1936, Reza Shah ordered all men to wear felt brimmed hats—the European bowler hats (*kolah farangi*). These hats had become fashionable in Europe. According to Hedayat Mukhber al-Saltane, who had retired but still maintained contact with the court at the time, this forced

fashion statement was another attempt to make Iranians look Western. In his memoir, Mukhber wrote:

In a meeting, the Shah lifted my hat and asked, “What do you think now?” [referring to his latest “civilizing” attempt by changing the Pahlavi Cap to the European hat], to which I responded, “The old one [Pahlavi Cap] had a better name.” Agitated, his majesty took some steps and retorted, “All I am trying to do is for us to look like them [European] so they [Westerners] would not ridicule us.” To which I replied, “And, of course, this has been a thoughtful consideration of yours. Then I said to myself, what they [Westerners] ridicule us for is because of what is under these hats, which are the type of our virtueless emulations of them.”<sup>22</sup>

Intended or not, for most people, the intent behind Reza Shah’s decision to impose brimmed hats was understood as another attempt to prevent faithful prayers to properly touch the ground with their foreheads, as it is required in Muslim prayer. These practices created a deep division between the state and society and caused resentment, riots, and protests. The result caused the loss of hundreds of lives and untold number injuries—and did not transform the society as Reza Shah had intended.<sup>23</sup>

### **Imagining the Nation**

Constitutive of the political discourse of modern-absolutism was the way it represented the official Irani from his internal and external other (*Khareji*). Iranian official nationalism was linked to three symbols or codes: history, language, and race. This construction was formed by a selective meaning of the history of Persia, of the Farsi language, and of the Aryan race. The shah was the critical link connecting these codes to the state and the nation of the past to the present. This linkage was supposed to reinforce the state official identity. These linkages are explicitly

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., v. 6, pp. 263-267. However, the longer version of this text is interesting in another way. Although Reza Shah and Mukhber had a different understanding of what Westerners might ridicule, they both were conscious of the fact that Westerners ridiculed Iranians. In this text, and many other texts, the distinction between us/them, superior/inferior Westerners/Iranians is very clear to both Reza Shah and Mukber, although their reactions are different.

<sup>23</sup> M. Afshar, *Ayandeh* June 1925, p. 5-6.

expressed in many of the modernists' texts during the Pahlavi dynasty. A great example of the linkage between the shah and the state is an editorial article in *Ayandeh (The Future)* published in 1925 by Mahmud Afshar, a European-educated political scientist, who wrote what was explicitly and implicitly expressed in many modernist newspapers, academic institutions, official slogans, and policies.

Our ideal is to develop and strengthen national unity. The same ideal created the nation-states of Germany, Italy, Poland, and Rumania. The same ideal destroyed the multinational state of the Ottoman Empire. What do we mean by "national unity"? We mean the formation of cultural, social, and political solidarity among all the people who live within the present borders of Iran. How will we attain national unity? We will attain [national unity] extending the Persian Language throughout the provinces; eliminate regional costumes; destroying local and feudal authorities; and removing the traditional differences between Kurds, Lurs, Qashqyis, Arabs, Turks, Turkmans, and other communities that reside within Iran. Our nation will continue to live in danger as long as we have no schools to teach Persian and Iranian history to the masses; no railways to connect the various parts of the country; no books, journals, and newspapers to inform the people of their rich Iranian heritage; and no Persian equivalents to replace the many non-Persian place names in Iran. Unless we achieve national unity, nothing will remain of Iran.<sup>24</sup>

In this text, the author linked the land, the language, and the nation to a pan-Persian view in which the Persians are the "true" Iranians and non-Persians are not "true" Iranians. Historically, these linkages were non-existent. Even in today's Iran, Farsi-speaking people easily understand those who live in Afghanistan and Tajikistan but not those who live within the borders of Iran. Therefore, making linkages among the land, language, and nation was as arbitrary then as it is now. But that was how modernists imagined and understood the nation.

### **Romanticizing History**

During Reza Shah's reign (1926-41), equipped with the state academic and intellectual machineries, the romanticization of history of the Persian Empire took on new dimensions.

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<sup>24</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, pp. 124-125. Translation by Morteza Saqeb-far, *Shahnameh-E Ferdosi and Iran's Philosophy of History (Shahnameh-E Ferdosi Va Falsafeh Tarikh-E Iran)* (Tehran: Qatreh-Moeyeen, 1998/1377).



During Reza Shah's era, the glories of the Persian Empire were linked to the state's modernization projects, and the majesties of its kings were linked to Reza Shah's absolutism. In these representations, as the Persian kings had been powerful and absolutist, so was Reza Shah. As the Persian kings had defeated the non-Iranians, so was Reza Shah. As the Persians people supposedly had revered their kings, so were the contemporary Iranians.

In this practicepractice, history was divided into "before the fall" and "after the fall" of the Persian Empire. While the history of Iranian rulers before the fall of the Sassanid Empire was romanticized as glorious and victorious, the history after the defeat of the Sassanid Empire by the Arabs was represented and understood as the period of miseries, defeats, and non-Iranian rulers. However, some exceptions to this general representation occurred. Abu Muslim Khurasani (700-755) had defeated the Abbasids' Caliphate, and he was thus represented as an Iranian ruler. So, too, was the Shah Abbas (1571-1629) who had defended Iran from the Ottomans. The fact that Shah Abbas was a Turk and spoke Turkish in his court did not disqualify him as an Iranian ruler. Nader Shah (1688-1747) was also represented as a great Iranian ruler and conqueror because he had defended Iran from the Ottomans, and he had defeated the Russians and had conquered India. Again, the fact that he was a Turk and spoke Farsi with difficulty did not diminish his stature as a great "true" Iranian ruler. Similarly, Reza Shah was also represented as a great modern shah—the equal of Cyrus the Great, Darius the Great, Abbas the Great, and, of course, Nader Shah the Great. Reza Shah was represented as the man who was supposedly restoring the glories of the past by building a strong, sovereign, modern state, which, of course, could become as powerful as the Western states.

### **Official Language**

Constitutive of the sub-discourse of the Iranian-outsider (*Irani/Khareji*) was how Farsi became the official language of the state. Officializing the language also reinforced the

differential relations between Iranians and non-Iranians, Persians and non-Persians, urban and rural, and Tehranis and Shahrestanis.

Farsi constituted a “true” Iranian language versus other languages. In officializing Farsi, the state organized and funded a Center for Cultural Iranian Studies, Farhangetsan, which, among other tasks, tried to purify the language of non-Persian words. It also turned Abol Qasem Ferdosi (935-1020) into the personification of Iranian official nationalism. Ferdosi’s most famous book, *Shah-Nameh*, is a collection of poetic narratives describing the majesties of Persian kings in their wars with non-Iranians, such as Toranian, Aniran, and Devan (devils). For the celebration of Ferdosi’s millennium, which was proposed by the scholars of the Oriental Studies at the time, the state built a grand memorial to Ferdosi.

For centuries, the importance of Ferdosi as an Iranian author has been what Homer is to the Greeks—an oral history that is more than the factual events of the past; it is a mythological narrative of the Iranian historical memory.<sup>25</sup> Imbued with metaphors, myths, and mysticism, Ferdosi’s narratives are understood temporally in time and space, but in its entirety, Ferdosi’s *Shah-Nameh* consists of a collective historical imagination that is kaleidoscopic in interpretation but unified in its form of delivery and presentation. In this collective imagination in form rather than content, the rhymes, rhythms, and melodies of the flowing words of Ferdosi have remained fixed in memories from one generation to the next. But the interpretation of his words has varied from one moment in space and time to the next. This collective imagination, however, was not just about Ferdosi. It was about Rumi, Saadi, Hafez, and hundreds of other literary works, but in the officialization of language, Ferdosi was privileged over other literary works.

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<sup>25</sup> Ahmad Kasravi, *Sheikh Safi and His Descendants* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1352).

For centuries, Iranian poetry has been the skin that covered the body of Iranian collective consciousness, the only collectivity that bound its otherwise fragmented body. This collective imagination was not, however, just about Ancient Persia or its kings. It was also about Islam, Erfan, Qur'an, and the experiencing of living and dying in one's time and space. These poems were not purely Persians. They were not anti-Arabic or anti-Turkic, and they in no way corresponded to the Pahlavi official nationalism. Ironically, not even Ferdosi was an anti-Arab or Turkic racist. After all, *Shah-Nameh* was written to be presented to Mahmood Ghaznavi (998-1030), the shah of a Turkic dynasty (975-1187), loyal to an Arab Caliphate (Abbasids 750-1258). Moreover, Ferdosi's language was not "purified" of Arabic or Turkic words.

For Iranians, regardless of their ethnic, religious, or geographic backgrounds, the poems of Ferdosi, Rumi, Hafez, and Sa'adi were not compatible with the language of Iranian official nationalism. Rumi wrote in Farsi, Turkic, and Arabic. The most famous Iranian poet, Hafez, had no reservation about using Arabic words, Qur'anic phrases, Islamic metaphors, and Shi'ite myths. If a "true" Iranian poet ever existed, Hafez would certainly qualify as one. On the other hand, Sa'adi, who ranked as high as Hafez, was more concerned about the physical world than Hafez's metaphysical world. Sa'adi was, however, a traveling political philosopher, a storyteller, a poet, and an advisor to different courts. He was—and still is—known to Iranians, as well as Afghans and Tajiks.

In other words, the language of Persian poetry, as a whole, had nothing to do with the language of official Iranian nationalism. Nevertheless, a particular reading of Ferdusi's narratives became a part of the official myths of the state. In the same way a few of the Iranian kings represented an official history, a narrow reading of Ferdosi represented the official language of the nation—supposedly a purified Farsi.

Therefore, Farhangestan concocted Persianized words to replace Arabic and Turkic words. In a series of directives, Farhangestan ordered the state bureaucracy to use Persianized words, phrases, titles, and even names. Accordingly, the state changed the names of government ministries. For example, the name of the Ministry of Justice changed from *Adleya* to *Daadgostary*. The Treasury Department changed from *Maliah* to *Dara'ee*. Besides, almost all well-known state officials changed their names and titles. For example, Adlol Mulk, once the speaker of the *Majlis*, became *Dadgar*, *Mushir al-Dewleh*. Two esteemed brothers in the 1906 Constitutional Revolutions changed their last names to *Pearnia*. Titles such as *Mirza* and *Khan* were dropped in official references. The name of many of the provinces and cities were Persianized. The southwestern province of Iran changed from *Arabestan* (home of Arabs) to *Khuzestan*. Ironically, the majority of Arab tribes who had lived in southwest Iran for centuries did not call the region *Arabestan*, a Persian word. They called this region *al-Hhozia*, which is also another deflected Persian word and the root word for the current name for the city of Ahwaza, the capital city in the province Khuzestan. The port city of *Mahmareh* was changed to *Khoramshahr*. Paradoxically, while local names were being Persianized, the most well-known Persian name of all, Persia, as Iran was then known to the world, was changed. In a 1936 directive to foreign embassies, the name of the country was officially changed from Persia to Iran, which was the word natives used for the country.

These rhetorical practices also penetrated into social practices. Arabic and religious names that Iranians had used for many centuries lost their linguistic neutralities, and, in many cases, the naming of children became an exercise of representing a variety of political identities—the same way clothes had become a political expression. For modernists, Persian names reflected the state

official patriotism while some Arabic and Shi'ite names had religious connotations.<sup>26</sup> However, with time, the politicization of Persian-Arabic names intensified not only for modernists, but also for other Islamists. In short, the purification of the language was linked to the official nationalism, and modernists' texts clearly showed the linkage.

Kasravi's texts could show an example of this linkage. Embedded in the official nationalism, Kasravi, who was born in a Turkish-speaking Azerbaijani family, began to refer to Iranian Turks as *Azaris* (people living in Azerbaijan).<sup>27</sup> In many of his writings, Kasravi made a bold claim: the people living in Azerbaijan and currently speaking Turkish were not and had never been Turks by race. They were indeed "true" Persians who had adopted the Turkish language after the invasion of Turkic tribes beginning in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. However, Kasravi did not explain why many other ethnic languages survived the many centuries of Turkic rule in Iran, but the Azaris did not. He made similar claims for the Arab-speaking population living in Khuzestan and southern Iraq. In a sense, Kasravi began to Persianize *Azaris*, as well as other ethnicities. For example, Kurds were represented as belonging to a branch of the Aryan (*Arya'ian*) ethnic group—the Medes (*Madah*). During the Pahlavi era, high school texts represented the Medes dynasty as a blood-relative of Achaemenids and thus "true" Persians. The Kurdish language was represented as the language of Avesta, Zoroaster, and Gathas (the hymns believed to be written by those of Zoroaster). Nevertheless, for modernists, the fact that Kurdish history and language were even more ancient than those of the Persians did not justify "Kurdicizing" Iran rather than "Persianizing" it, as Kasravi tried to do.

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<sup>26</sup> While widely used names, such as Ali, Hassan, Hussein, and Mohammad, are politically neutral. Some have definite religious attachment, intended or not.

<sup>27</sup> Makki, *Tarikh-E Bist Saleh-E Iran (History of Twenty Years)* v. 6, p. 206.

Kasravi's attempt to "purify" Farsi from its own historical experience—by detaching it from the present and then linking it to a dubious past—was a typical understanding of how the discourse of modern absolutism understood official nationalism. Kasravi's books and writings are full of creatively constructed words, which make it difficult to follow an otherwise excellent historical account of the 1906 Constitutional Revolution.

Nevertheless, as Kasravi's purification of the language failed, so did the state Persianization policies, as expected. More than 40% of words in Farsi are Arabic. Farsi is written in the Arabic alphabet, and any language is a social experience not easily amenable to political design.<sup>28</sup> Separating Farsi from foreign words was as impossible attempt of an event as separating the English language would be from its Germanic, French, or Latin words. But much like the attempt to impose dress codes, the Persianization of the language had unintended consequences. In the short run, Persianization provided a source of entertainment because some Farsi words created in the offices of Farhangestan had dual meanings and connotations. Even Reza Shah was aware of these situations. Once, he was so angered by the ridiculousness of a newly concocted word that he appointed himself as the final check before new words were officialized into directives. The situation was full of irony because Reza Shah was known for being almost illiterate.<sup>29</sup>

However, the lasting result of the language purification was the construction of internal others—Turks, Kurds, Arbas, Lurs, and so forth. For several millennia, people speaking different languages had lived on the Iranian plateau. The possibility existed that some of these languages have, or might have, common roots. But in practice, the Gilaks, Turks, Lurs, Kurds, Arabs,

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<sup>28</sup> In the 1930s, a serious debate took place for changing the Farsi alphabet from Arabic to Farsi, as Atatürk had done in Turkey, but the proposal failed.

<sup>29</sup> Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979*, p. 177.

Bluches, and Turcomans could not communicate with each other or with the Farsi-speaking population. These Farsi-speaking people constituted roughly half of the country's population at the time, but the people living in different location did not have to communicate with each other in the past. However, during Reza Shah's rule, the officialization of the Persian language was not successful. It did not create a unified national image, but instead politicized history and language.

### **An Official National Race**

Race also became an approved key word for official Iranian nationalism. Textual representation of "true" Iranians was that of a superior race.<sup>30</sup> Aryan (*Arya'ian*) was explicitly represented as being superior to Arabs, Turks, and other ethnicities.<sup>31</sup> Even elementary and high school textbooks stated that savage Arabs, Mongols, Tartar, Turks, Uzbek, and Afghans were counterpoised to gentle, highly cultured Iranians. Interestingly, Iranian victories over other nations were represented as "civilizing missions," For example, the invasion of India by Nader Shah matched, if not surpassed, the savagery of those who invaded Iran, but this savagery was represented as the greatness of Nader Shah. No Iranian invasion, however, was represented as "savage"—but "savage" was used to describe the Arab invasion of Iran in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. One of the Persianized words Farhangestan coined for the word "Arab" was *Tazi*. The supporting argument for this coinage was that in the ancient texts, Iranians referred to Arabs as *Tazian*—the plural form for *Tazi*. Although the historic credence of this claim is dubious at best, the current meaning of *Tazi* is that of a "savage" or the name for a type of "hunting dog." Nevertheless, in official and literary texts Arabs were referred to as *Tazian*. Interestingly, to date, this word has

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<sup>30</sup> For the purpose of this dissertation, I refer to "race" only in its rhetorical practices and not in reference to any apparent or not-so-apparent physiological or cultural differences.

<sup>31</sup> "Aryan" is a categorical race and language designation attribute to the people who shared an Indo-European mother language. The meaning of the word has gone through some changes of its own.

never entered popular texts, but it has remained in modernists' texts. In any event, these racist connotations entered into fictional literature where the imagery of Arab and Turkic savageries were truly noteworthy. In later decades, a particular literary genre developed in Iran: *Roman-e Tarikhi* (romantic history) with three common themes in this genre. First, Iranians were victimized by the Arabs and later by the Turks. Second, the post-Arab invasion of Iran has been a struggle to defend the Iranian civilization from savages. Third, early Islamic-Arab achievements in arts and sciences were actually the achievements of the Persians—not those of the Arabs.

Academia also had a great role in the creation of this knowledge. In 1934, when the University of Tehran formally opened, many prominent modernist figures helped establish a new field—Iranology (*Iran Shenasi*). Iranology was a bridge that connected Persian history, language, literature, and architecture to Iranian official nationalism. Abdolhossein Zarinkoub, Zabihola Safa, and Badiozzaman Forouzanfar were three of the founders of Iranology. During this era, Allameh Dehkhoda published his 15-volume Persian dictionary. Interestingly, Iranology had begun in 1903 at the University of Göttingen in Germany. Not surprisingly, during the 1930s, when Reza Shah admired Germany as an ideal Western developmental template, the University of Göttingen was at the apex of the production of knowledge in the newly established field of Iranology. This new field produced academic and scientific knowledge for the Iranian official nationalism. The common theme among Iranologists was to compare the glories of the past to the miseries of the present. However, in this glory-misery dichotomy, the official nationalism related the glories of the past to the unity of God, the state, and the people. Not surprisingly, throughout the Pahlavi dynasty, the state motto was “God, King, and Nation”



(*Khoda, Shah, Mehan*). This slogan was imprinted on mountain-sides, billboards, lawns, and other visible places.

### **Relations with Other States: Identities, Alliances, and Enemies**

As modern absolutism became the official state discourse, it helped constitute the direction of Iran's relations with other states. The identification of allies and enemies was ranked, based upon the extent to which the other reinforced or weakened the official state discourse.<sup>32</sup> A foreign state would be ranked as an ideal ally if it helped reinforce the state official identity, but it would be ranked as a potential enemy if it threatened the official state discourse. In this hierarchic construction of allies-enemies, us-them, and Irani-khareji, the Soviet Union was ranked at the top of the state's enemies, and the Western states were considered potential allies. Nevertheless, not all states were ranked equally. While Germany and the United States ranked at the top of ideal allies, Britain was ranked at the bottom of the state allies.

This hierarchic ordering of allies and enemies had come out of the Iranian experience of World War I, the Russian October Revolution, the political disintegration of Iran during World War I, and the defeat of the 1919 Agreement.<sup>33</sup> These experiences prepared the way for the construction of how Iran ranked the allies and enemies. But these experiences were not in accordance with some universally understood objective reality as the basis for making these decisions. Instead, the hierarchic ordering of allies-enemies was the result of how political discourses represented and understood Self in relation to others.

Accordingly, the official state discourse represented and understood Germany as an ideal ally that reinforced how the state represented its developmental model, race, and external others

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<sup>32</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>33</sup> See Chapter 6.

(Russia and Britain). The official discourse also represented the United States as an ideal ally that was disinterested in colonial competition. Thus, officials attempted to solicit an alliance with the United States despite the fact that the United States showed little or no interest in Iran until World War II. Hence, Iran gladly acquiesced in making an alliance with Germany or desired to do the same with the United States. However, Iran represented Britain as an ally that preserved Iran against the Soviet Union at the price of robbing Iran for its own interest. Thus, while it remained in a preservative alliance with Britain, it simultaneously resented, suspected, and resisted Britain's influence. Relatedly, Iran represented and understood the Soviets as the main external and internal threat to Iran's sovereignty. In many ways, this hierarchic ordering of allies and enemies differs from the argument that economic interdependence reduces security concerns. In this case, Iran's Anglo-Russo economic and political interdependence was at a high level, but the Soviet Union was considered as an enemy and Britain as a suspect ally. In contrast, Germany and the United States, which started with no economic and political interest in Iran, were ranked as ideal allies. By 1941, Germany had become the most influential ally of Iran, but the United States had chosen to remain disengaged. Hence, Reza Shah made the decision to enter into an alliance with Germany or the United States. The resentment to remain in a preservative alliance with Britain and to fearfully take a defensive position against the Soviet Union made sense only in the context of how the state understood itself in relation to others.

### **Relations with Germany: Acquiescent Alliance**

During Reza Shah's reign, Germany was represented as an ally because it reinforced the official state discourse by supporting Iran's absolutism, by cooperating in Iran's developmental projects, and by reinforcing Iran's official nationalism. When Reza Shah's regime began, Germany had no economic interests or political influence in Iran, but by the time Reza Shah was forced to abdicate in 1941, Germany had become the most important ally of Iran. In this alliance,

with a determined and deliberate deference to Germany, Iranian elites made an alliance with Germany, which, to a certain extent, was reciprocated. This acquiescent alliance turned out to be a strategic blunder by Reza Shah and the highly Western-educated ruling class. During this time, Iran awarded Germany the contract for the construction of the Iranian National Railroad, which was the most emblematic developmental program during Reza Shah's reign. The railroad was viewed as an essential part of the modernization program. The building of the railroad, on average, took 5% of the national budget from 1934 to 1941.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, by 1940, Germany became Iran's most important and respected trading partner, and, to a certain extent, helped break the trading monopolies that the Soviets and the British had maintained for decades.<sup>35</sup> However, the German presence in Iran reflected more than an economic or security interest. At the time, the official state discourse represented Germany as two nations of the same race—the Aryan race. Officials represented Germany as reliable trading partners, worthy allies, neutral military advisors, honest government administrators, competent industrial experts, and superior architects, as evident in the construction of government buildings of the period. Moreover, the representation of German brand names as reliable products increasingly made those products desirable in Iran. The German educational system was also admired. More students were sent to Germany to study than all other European states combined. Even in popular street rhymes, Germany was praised as an emerging power that could defeat the British.<sup>36</sup>

However, this acquiescent alliance was not the result of an objective analysis of Iran's domestic and international environment following rational adaptation. Instead, it had emerged

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<sup>34</sup> Makki, *Tarikh-E Bist Saleh-E Iran (History of Twenty Years)* v. 6, p. 222.

<sup>35</sup> Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*, p. 271.

<sup>36</sup> *Baloon to hava khoda khodash-e/frangee mordeh-e vo Alman bejash-e*, This rhyme equated the technological advancing of Germany in the air and referred to how the British were dying and the Germans were replacing them.

out of the formation of a particular understanding of Self in relation to others. In this representation, Germany reinforced how state-elites understood themselves. The official discourse reinforced Iran's state-building projects, nationalism, and foreign relations. Although making an alliance with Germany might sound like an irrational decision now, it was a perfectly rational decision within the context of the official state discourse that constituted the state collective preferences.

### **Relations with Britain: Preservative Alliance**

Compared to Germany, Reza Shah's era began with Britain having the most economic interests in Iran. Nevertheless, Britain was ranked at the bottom of the hierarchic ordering of Iran's allies. In contrast to the Iran-Germany alliance, the Iran alliance with Britain was not an alliance reached by acquiescence. Instead, Britain had imposed on Iran, and Iran had no other choice but to go along. During Reza Shah's rise to power, state survival depended upon making a preservative alliance with Britain. The choice was a simple one. After Britain lost its bid to take the administrative control of Iran by way of the 1919 Agreement, it decided to instead prop up a pro-British regime headed by Colonel Reza Khan. This strategy suited the majority of the contending identities in Iran because the country was on the verge of collapse by internal disintegration and external threats. This reluctant acceptance of, and continued resistance to, British rule was constitutive of Iranian national identity. This identity emerged as an "imagined community" of an otherwise fragmented Self in relation to the foreign others (*Irani/khareji*). As in the case of the 1919 Agreement when Vosuq's cabinet had reluctantly accepted but continually resisted its passage, Iran reluctantly accepted but continued resisting Britain during Reza Shah's reign.

However, as the power of the state increased, so did the resentment toward Britain, which undermined not only the state's official identity, but also other contending signifiers—people,

class, Islam, and the law. First, the state resented Britain because it undermined its conceptualization of an absolutist and modernizing order. The mere association of Britain with the state undermined the image of an absolutist king of kings (*shahanshahs*), whose divine rule was supposed to free Iran from foreign powers and modernize it. Second, it also undermined popular nationalism because Britain had already been represented as the Iranian “historic” other since the Tobacco Uprising in 1876. This image had been reinforced only by many events, including World War I and the 1919 Agreement. Third, socialists resented Britain as the primary imperialistic and colonial other. Fourth, Islamists identities hated Britain for destroying the Islamic and traditional way of life. Finally, constitutionalists resented Britain for undermining the legal basis of Iran’s constitutional government and supporting a military regime. In short, the hatred for Britain was almost universal, but the state remained in a preservative alliance with Britain while resenting, suspecting, and resisting it. In other words, the alliance simultaneously maintained and undermined the state and created tension.

This tension put Reza Shah in a precarious position. As someone who had come to power with the help of the British, he consciously went out of his way to point out that he was a “true” independent nationalist. Thus, he harshly punished those suspected of having the slightest contact with the foreign powers in Iran. On one occasion, in front of some notable elites, he said, “I know the British brought me to power, but I have served my country well.”<sup>37</sup> In other words, he badly needed to show himself as independent from British control. Therefore, he never allowed British advisors to take part in his state-building projects, and never funded students to go to Britain for an education.

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<sup>37</sup> Pahlavi Mohammed Reza, *Answer to History* (New York: Stein and Day, 1980), p.124.

Reza Shah also suspected the British as being the mastermind behind many conspiratorial schemes. This suspicion cost the lives of many of his most loyal supporters and created mass suffering and misery. Reza Shah construed even the slightest criticism as yet another British conspiracy to overthrow him. However, representing the British as the mastermind behind all political and non-political issues had by then become a hegemonic and pervasive understanding in Iranian politics. Elites as well as the common people constructed incredible narratives about how the British controlled every behind-the-scenes situation. In this atmosphere of suspicion, official or non-official contacts with foreign powers, especially those with the British and the Soviets, were deemed as potential conspiracies against the state. Mohammad Reza Shah's memoir contains many references to how his father was suspicious of Mohammad Mussadiq's being an agent for Britain.<sup>38</sup>

The atmosphere of suspicion deeply influenced the way diplomatic relations were conducted. For example, a complimentary comment in *The Daily Mirror* published in London caused an uproar in the country and endangered the lives of many of Qajar descendants living in Tehran.<sup>39</sup> On another occasion, some French newspapers published articles referring to the dilapidated conditions of Iran and its corrupted leaders. Upon reading these derogatory articles, Reza Shah abruptly broke off diplomatic relations with France. Relations were reestablished only after the French president wrote a letter and asked Reza Shah to reconsider his position. In his response, the shah blamed the French newspapers for not "really knowing" about Iran and expressed his hope for reestablishing mutual trust between the parties (*ravabet bar asa's-e mohkam va moeta'meda'nea*).<sup>40</sup> In other words, the state understood Western criticism as a form

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<sup>38</sup> Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*, pp. 320-321.

<sup>39</sup> Makki, *Tarikh-E Bist Saleh-E Iran (History of Twenty Years)* v. 6, pp. 410-412.

<sup>40</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 162.

of conspiracy against the regime—a theme that was repeated many times. This perspective resulted in the policy of banning any direct or indirect contacts with foreign governments unless approved by the shah.

In addition to the atmosphere of suspicion, Anglo-Iranian relations were imbued with resentment. For example, in 1934, Britain sold the rights for exploration and subsequent production of the oil fields and oil production in Bahrain to Standard Oil of California. Bahrain was formally recognized as a part of Iranian territory, but it had been under British occupation since 1861. Once the sale became public, Iran announced that the transaction was illegal. However, it had to quietly swallow its pride and submit to the reality on the ground.

Another point of resentment was complete British control of the Iranian oil industry. Britain determined the level of production, managed the distribution routes, marketed the petroleum products, and even chose the accounting practices, which cheated Iran of its already meager revenue share. Additionally, Britain would not hire Iranians for its managerial positions, and clearly discriminated against Iranian laborers. The housing quarters for Iranian and British staff varied significantly. In front of the British residential quarters, a sign was posted: *No Iranian Allowed*. Britain, in most cases, dealt with oil workers—by far the largest segment of the Iranian industrial working class—very poorly. An example of this harshness follows:

On May Day 1929, eleven thousand workers in the oil refinery struck for higher wages, an eight-hour day, paid annual vacations, company housing, and union recognition. Although the oil company granted the wage demands, the British navy dispatched a gunboat to Basra, and the Iranian authorities arrested over five hundred workers. The British foreign minister formally congratulated the shah for his “speedy and effective handling of the incident.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Makki, *Tarikh-E Bist Saleh-E Iran (History of Twenty Years)* v. 6., p. 156.

While the people resented the discriminatory policies of the oil company, the state resented Britain because it was at the mercy of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company for its revenue. Therefore, the tension between the two states was always very high.

In 1932, for example, Britain's deliberate lowering of the oil production in Iran reduced Iran's revenue. Frustrated by the lack of control over the state budget, Reza Shah ordered the sudden cancellation of the oil concession.<sup>42</sup> The popular media celebrated the move, but after more than a year of negotiation, the shah had to once again submit to a modified version of the original oil concession, which had been agreed to under dubious circumstances. The 1933 oil agreement increased the duration of the concession from the remaining 27 years to 60 years. Additionally, it changed the flexible revenue share of Iran from 16% of the profit to a fixed share of four shillings per barrel.

This was a clear defeat for Iran—and the shah resented it.<sup>43</sup> Upset with this defeat, Reza Shah punished those who negotiated the agreement. Timour-tash, chief negotiator of the agreement and one of the most loyal supporters of the state, lost his life on the accusation that he had angered Britain by also entering into negotiation with the Russians. The Iranian signatory to the agreement, Hassan Taqizadeh, who had served the state for many decades, was deported for his part and his reputation was ruined.

In short, Britain imposed an alliance on the state, and Iran reluctantly submitted to it for the sake of its survival. This preservative alliance was not, however, a sustainable one because almost all other identities understood Britain as their foreign other.

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<sup>42</sup> The concession was originally granted to a British subject named William Darcy in 1901. In 1909, the concession was taken over by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. In 1914, when the British government converted its navy from coal to oil, it decided to nationalize the company by acquiring 51% share of the company.

<sup>43</sup> For example, Taqizadeh, who was involved with the negotiations, thought that the new contract was a defeat.



## **Relations with the Soviet Union: Defensive Confrontation**

Constitutive of the discourse of modern absolutism was the representation of the Soviets as a threat to the very survival of the absolutist state, its development projects, and its official nationalism. Given the historical experiences of Iranians, understanding the Soviet Union as the main external threat might have been expected. Iran feared the Soviet Union as a potential occupier. Iran also feared the Soviet Union as a revolutionary force. Understanding the Soviet Union as the primary external threat constituted Iran's foreign relations with the Soviet Union. While Iran cautiously treated the Soviets' concerns on trade, economic, and political issues, it remained committed to the alliance with Britain, and Iran entered into new security agreements with its neighboring countries for defense against the Soviets.

The treaty of Saad Aabad was one of these measures. In July 1937, after serious concession on Iran's part, the Saad Aabad Pact was signed. Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iran agreed to a collective non-aggression pact in which an attack on either one of those countries could constitute an aggression on all. For the successful conclusion of this pact, in its relation with Iraq, Iran gave up substantial revenue rights in Shat al-Arab. Iran also gave up its territorial rights to some of the richest oil fields in western Iran, which is now Iraq. In its alliance with Turkey, Iran gave up its claim to some of the strategic territories in Ararat's mountaintops. In its alliance with Afghanistan, Iran accepted the borders that the British had imposed on Iran in the 1850s. Reza Shah felt these concessions were small prices to pay for securing Iran from the Russian-Soviets. For instance, General Arfa, who was charged with surveying the borders between Iran and Turkey, wrote about a brief meeting with Reza Shah. In the meeting, Arfa tried to explain the strategic significance of various mountaintops. The general wrote that Reza Shah angrily snapped back at him and said:

It is obvious that you have not understood what I mean . . . it is not important which location is better or worse, higher or lower. The important thing is that after a few hundred years of division between Iran and Turkey . . . [they must] become friends . . . against our common enemies . . . [the Russians who] defeated Abbas Mirza in 1928 while Turkey remained silent . . . then in 1829, Russian troops attacked the Turks. . . . Obviously, if both countries were friends then Russian troops would not have attacked Iran first and then Turkey next.<sup>44</sup>

As this text clearly shows, Reza Shah did not make a distinction between the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. For him, the Soviets remained the primary enemy as the Russians had been for more than a century. For modernists, the Soviet Union was understood as an old threat to Iran's sovereignty and identity, and it was also a new threat to Iran's Western-oriented identity with development. In most texts, the Soviet Union was referred to as "Russian-Soviets" (*Russi-ye Shuravi*). The phrase invoked the Russian body of the regime rather than its socialist face. The Soviet Union had dramatically changed its behavior toward Iran, from the perspective of official Iranian nationalism and also for the majority of the population. The Soviets invoked two images, which were deeply embedded in Iranian social understanding. The Soviets were viewed as a brutal occupying state and also as a source of civil war, chaos, and revolutions.

### **Relations with the United States: Acquiescent Alliance**

In the early 1900s, the United States was represented and admired as a great non-colonial power. For example, in 1911, in what came to be known as the "Shuster affair," Iran hired Dr. Morgan Shuster to modernize its treasury department, but it was forced to fire him because Russia—with the British consent—invaded Iran.<sup>45</sup> In other cases, Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, first presented in January 1918, had been widely published and understood as the U.S.

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<sup>44</sup> Memoirs of General Arfa who had been charged with surveying boundaries between Iran and Turkey, W. Morgan Shuster, *The Strangling of Persia; a Story of the European Diplomacy and Oriental Intrigue That Resulted in the Denationalization of Twelve Million Mohammedans, a Personal Narrative* (New York,: The Century Co., 1912).

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter 6. Also see Amir-zia Gafari, *Nagsh-E America Dar Iran: Sadeh Capitalisyoan (the Role of America in Iran: The Century of Capitulation)* (Tehran: Amir Kabir 1380/2001), p.106.

position against Britain. Additionally, to the dismay of the British Foreign Office in Tehran, the U.S. objection to the 1919 Agreement had also been widely published in Iran. These representations of the United States raised its stature as the disinterested defender of Iranian sovereignty. During Reza Shah's rule, the positive representation of the United States continued. These positive representations depicted the United States as an ideal counterweight against British imperial designs.

Additionally, in popular texts, the representation of Americans almost matched that of German ideal. Americans were viewed as sincere, ethical, and hardworking people. This was in sharp contrast to the negative representation of the Russians as brutes and the British as sneaky. For example, in 1909, Howard C. Baskerville, a teacher in a missionary school in Tabriz, joined the constitutional revolutionaries and fought many battles on behalf of Iranian constitutionalists. In one of these battles, the loyalist troops surrounded Baskerville and eleven of his comrades-in-arms. To save his comrades, Baskerville charged the troops and he was killed. Thousands of people attended his funeral and buried their American national hero.<sup>46</sup> In the funeral, prominent revolutionaries compared Baskerville's decency to the indecencies of the Russians and British. Two years later, this positive image of Americans was reinforced when Morgan Shuster tried to reform the Iranian Customs. In his attempt, he offended the Russians but invoked the admiration of Iranians as an honest and ethical American. Unlike Britain and Russia, prior to World War I, the representation of the U.S. involvement in Iran centered on the concern for the safety of American missionaries.<sup>47</sup> In other words, Iranians had positive images of both America as a state and Americans as a people.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> U.S. State Department, (1910-21), Decimal File 891.801A, March 830, 1921.

During Reza Shah's reign, the state went out of its way to engage the United States in Iranian politics. For example, in 1921, Iran formally wanted to employ ten American advisors.<sup>48</sup> Iran specifically wanted to rehire Shuster as the head of the Iranian Central Bank.<sup>49</sup> In 1922, the U.S. State Department agreed to the hiring of Dr. Arthur Millspaugh as the head of Iran's Treasury General. In 1927, Reza Shah fired Millspaugh because the shah's vision of a centralized and growing government did not correspond with that of Millspaugh's vision of small and efficient government. However, the firing of Millspaugh did not diminish the status of America or Americans.

Additionally, Iran tried to solicit American-based companies to invest in the Iranian oil industry. In 1921, Iran first offered a generous oil concession to the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey.<sup>50</sup> Then, in 1922, Iran reoffered it to the Sinclair Oil Company. Nevertheless, the policy of engaging the United States and its companies failed for four reasons. First, unlike Britain and Russia, the United States had a hands-off policy over its oil companies. Second, to avoid competition, Britain entered into separate contracts with these possible concessionaires and offered to buy their rights for a fast cash profit. This was a deal breaker for Iran because it would increase the influence of the British Oil Company and not decrease it as Iran had intended.<sup>51</sup> Third, the Soviet Union declared that it would not allow the transport of Iranian oil over its territory, thus making the cost of transportation prohibitive. Finally, the Soviets, citing previous treaties, effectively protested that Iran had no right to give concessions to a third party in its

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., Decimal File 891.801A, April 810, 1921.

<sup>49</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 131.

<sup>50</sup> Makki, *Tarikh-E Bist Saleh-E Iran (History of Twenty Years)* v. 6., p. 334-338.

<sup>51</sup> Majid Sharifi, "A Historical Review of the Caspian Sea (*Bahsee Dar Mored Daryai Khazar Va Dor Namay Aan*) " *Azadi*, no. 30 (2003/1382).

northern territories, which were in the previous Russian sphere of influence. The Soviets argued that the cancellation of its rights gained under the tsars was contingent upon those rights not to be given to a third party.<sup>52</sup> The Soviet objection resulted in the 1922 Treaty of Friendship between Iran and the Soviets, which clarified some of these ambiguities.<sup>53</sup> However, Iran's intention to engage the United States had failed.

### **Conclusion**

The rise of Reza Shah to power became possible when restoration of order and security became the signifier under which otherwise contending identities united. Backed by Britain, a military coup brought Reza Shah to power and most political forces acquiesced. The state began to restore order and security by militarizing, bureaucratizing, and centralizing the government. Once the state consolidated its power, it began to push for state building, national imagining, and conducting foreign policy. I have called this political identity "modern absolutism."

I have called it "modern" because the state began to signify and treat modernization projects as a historical mission bestowed upon the state by a divine design. I have also called it "absolutism" because the shah eventually personified the state and essentially became the absolute sovereign over all aspects of social, political, and economic life. The motto for Reza Shah's state-building project began with restoration of order and security (*nazam va amniat*) to the country, and it ended up consolidating its power by forging a particular image of Iranian nationalism by which a "true" Iranian was differentiated from its internal or external "non-Iranian" Other.

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<sup>52</sup> Mirfendereski, *A Diplomatic History of the Caspian Sea: Treaties, Diaries, and Other Stories*.

<sup>53</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (London; New York: Verso, 2001).

In this section, I argued that the official identity of the state constituted its policies and practices. Moreover, the state discourse formation permeated the meanings of order, development, law, Islam, and class. By 1920s, the meaning of political order (*nezam*), social order (*nazm*), public security (*amniat umoomy*), and public interest had become attached to the building of a modern, centralized, and bureaucratized state that was absolute and divine and thus law unto itself. In contrast, during the 1906 Constitutional Revolution, law was the primary signifying identity of the state. Law was imagined as the foundation for political and social order, as well as the basis for providing public security and interest. Hence, law or the constitution was imagined as being sovereign unto itself and thus the state. Furthermore, law permeated the meanings of development, Islam, class, and people. However, during Reza Shah's rule, order permeated the meanings of other signifiers.

Accordingly, the official state discourse constituted how the state understood an ideal political order, developmental projects, and official nationalism by forging a particular official patriotism, history, language, and race. The state discourse constituted the direction of Iran's relations with other states. The ranking of allies and enemies was based upon the extent to which a state reinforced or weakened the official state discourse.

In 1941, when Allies invaded Iran for the second time in less than 40 years, the regime collapsed and neither elites nor the people rushed to rescue it. Instead, some of the most ardent supporters of the state discourse turned into its outspoken critics. Once again various contending identities began to compete for hegemony. Chapter 4 will examine this competition from 1941 to 1951 when constitutionalists and modernists controlled the state and other contending discourses struggle to establish their own hegemony. The consequence of this competition was the emergence of Iranian democratic nationalism, which is the subject of Chapter 4 and 5.

## CHAPTER 4 THE FALL OF REZA SHAH AND THE SHARING OF THE STATE (1941-1951)

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I will review how the fall of Reza Shah's regime provided a condition conducive to the re-emergence of free political expression by contending discourses. Each discourse was struggling to establish its respective political hegemony in a context in which Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States were also competing to control the state.<sup>1</sup> This created a condition favorable to an unprecedented level of freedom of expression concomitant with shifts in policies and practices. Nevertheless, with the end of the occupation 1947, the discourse of monarchic modernism began to largely constitute state building, the nation imagining, and conducting foreign policy.

In this chapter, I will discuss events and discourses from 1941 to 1951. Then I will review Iran's state building, nation imagining, and conducting foreign policy in this era.

### **Events (1941-1951)**

#### **The Fall of Reza Shah and the Sharing of the State**

On August 25, 1941, dissatisfied with Reza Shah's declaration of neutrality, Soviet forces from the north and British forces from the south invaded Iran. The state collapsed in less than a month. For the most part, Iranians had no idea of the turmoil that was to befall them. Three days after the invasion, Reza Shah's military spun into disarray. Generals in Tehran released thousands of soldiers from their duties, while other soldiers escaped to their villages. Reza Shah was confused and indecisive as to whether to surrender or resist. His confusion sent conflicting signals to the Allies and exacerbated the British loss of confidence in Reza Shah's

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of political hegemony, see Makki, *Tarikh-E Bist Saleh-E Iran (History of Twenty Years)* v.vii.

loyalty.<sup>2</sup> On the fifth day of the invasion, Reza Shah appointed Mohammad Ali Furuqi (Zaka al-Mulk) who accepted the conditional surrender of Iranian sovereignty and negotiated the terms of Reza Shah's abdication. By the third week, the previously irrelevant *Majlis* began to demand more control over the cabinet.<sup>3</sup> In short, within a few weeks from the invasion, the myth of Reza Shah's invincibility was shattered.

For 16 years, Iranians had experienced and understood Reza Shah as the personification of a man on a historic mission to lead his nation of Persians to its rightful place among civilized Western states. But in less than a month, both the mission and the dictator had failed. Reza Shah agreed to the dictated terms of his abdication, which allowed his son, Mohamad Reza, to save the Pahlavi dynasty.

Soon after the invasion, the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) began to broadcast an unprecedented radio campaign against Reza Shah. The common theme of these messages was to characterize Reza Shah as a cruel, corrupt, and illegitimate leader of Iran who had stolen property from the people, mismanaged the economy, and murdered innocent citizens.<sup>4</sup> However, the shift from supporting Reza Shah's autocratic rule for two decades to invading Iran in alliance

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<sup>2</sup> Before the invasion, in a speech to graduating officers, Reza Shaw cancelled their customary vacations and warned them of the imminent threat to the country. Sixteen days after the invasion, *Itial'lat* published an article titled *The People are Sadden (Tasor-e Mordom)*. The article, which was picked up by the international press, sent the signal to the effect that the shah might intend to mobilize the masses against the Allied invasion.

<sup>3</sup> See Ali Dashti's speech in the Twelve Majlis. "Foreign Relations of the United States 1941 ", ed. The Near East and Africa The British Commonwealth (United States Government Printing Office, 1959).

<sup>4</sup> Although the pretext for the occupation was the presence of the German fifth column in Iran, the occupation occurred because London and Moscow did not trust Reza Shah to remain neutral if Germany's military advances on the Eastern Front continued. The Allies also wanted to have a secure access to southern and northern oil fields in Iran in addition to a secured road and railway system from the Persian Gulf to the northern borders. The pervasive sympathy for Germany in southern tribes could have caused serious trouble for the Allies as it had during World War I. Moreover, in March 1941, Rashid Gilani, an Iraqi nationalist, had overthrown Abdullah's pro-British government in Iraq. Although the coup in Iraq eventually failed and Gilani escaped to Tehran, it alarmed Winston Churchill into preventive actions in Iran. For more, see correspondence between the United States Council in Tehran and Washington from June to September 1941, in volume iii, Pahlavi Mohammed Reza, *Mission for My Country*, 1st ed. (New York,: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 75.



with the Soviet Union and attempting to teach Iranian democracy only reinforced the already existing perception that Britain, with the full consent of the Soviet Union, had installed Reza Shah as they wished and deported him when they both pleased. The negative image of foreigners reinforced the idea of a weak Self in opposition to the great powers of foreigners. This perception was further validated when the cabinet recognized the Allies' de facto sovereignty over the occupied territories in the south and north, agreed to cooperate with the Allies, and declared war against Germany, Italy, and Japan.<sup>5</sup>

With the fall of Reza Shah's regime, the official state discourse began to compete with other contending discourses for reestablishing its previous hegemony. It formed an alliance with the United States without alienating Britain or directly confronting the Soviet Union. From 1941 to 1951, Iran went through "12 premiers, 31 cabinets, and 148 ministers" as various discourses competed to establish their respective idealized nation-states. The intense competition among contending discourses caused socio-political chaos. But it also popularized the six Iranian basic signifiers—security, development, law, people, class equality, and Islam—among the masses.<sup>6</sup>

As in previous periods, during this era, the state understood itself and behaved in accordance with, and in response to, how it related to other contending discourses. From the fall of Reza Shah until the 1953 CIA coup, for the most part, modern absolutists controlled the court and military, constitutionalists held on to the *Majlis*, and Islamists, socialists, and democratic nationalists became the opposing discourses. From 1951 until the 1953 CIA coup, Mussadiq

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<sup>5</sup> Years later, in an effort to reconstruct history to reinforce his rule, despite the fact that the Allies had imposed this alliance on Iran, Mohamad Reza Shah claimed that this tripartite alliance "was not merely inevitable but also highly desirable." See Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 170.

<sup>6</sup> Frances Bostock and Geoffrey Jones, *Planning and Power in Iran: Ebtahaj and Economic Development under the Shah* (London, England; Totowa, N.J.: F. Cass, 1989).

managed to control the state by uniting the opposing identities against Britain. I will discuss that era in Chapter 5.

## **The Building of a New State**

### **Economic Development**

In the same way Germany had produced a state-centered developmental knowledge for Reza Shah, the United States produced a liberal and market-centered developmental knowledge for Iran, which Mohamad Reza Shah attempted to adopt. This was a clear shift from the previous era.

Speaking from the position of modern absolutism, the head of Iran's central bank in December 1942, Abul Qasim Ebtehaj, argued that Iran's development depended not only on financial assistance, but also on an economic template from the United States.<sup>7</sup> It was inconceivable that Iran could develop independently of foreign powers. Now that Germany had been eliminated, the United States became the source of knowledge for developmental model for Iran. The plan for Iran's development was not, however, designed according to Iran's socioeconomic needs or conditions. Instead, the plan was a global template designed at New Hampshire's Bretton Woods Conference in July 1944. By 1949, the Bretton Woods discourse of development had become a one-size-fits-all model that the United States and Britain adopted for all the countries in the Middle East. Essentially, the plan became a "regime of truth" that called for economic development by privatizing state-owned industries, by getting rid of nepotism and bureaucratic inefficiencies, and by promoting open trade. Britain wanted the plan because it allowed Britain to maintain and consolidate its financial holdings in the Middle East. The United States promoted it because it would allow expansion into Middle East markets. But the Soviet

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<sup>7</sup> George Benedict Baldwin, *Planning and Development in Iran* (Baltimore,: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967).

Union rejected the plan as a capitalist developmental design. Nevertheless, Iran—the subject of the plan—had no voice in making the plan, so it acquiesced to it.

In addition to the epistemic knowledge for the developmental plan in Iran, the details of the plan were produced and proposed by an American engineering firm, Morrison Knudsen of Boise, Idaho, which had prepared it in less than four months of surveying in Iran. The plan gave priority to modernization in agriculture, transportation, education, health, and security. As expected, Mohamad Reza Shah liked the security and the transportation segments of it, but opposed or ignored the rest. Based on this plan, Iran applied for a \$250 million loan from the World Bank (WB), which in turn demanded another “expert” evaluation of Iran.<sup>8</sup>

An engineering group, Overseas Consultants, Inc. (OCI), which was recommended by the U.S. State Department, provided the evaluation report.<sup>9</sup> In 1949, after only four months of surveying Iran, OCI, which was associated with both the U.S. oil industry and the newly-formed Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), presented a plan. The *Majlis* passed the plan enthusiastically and immediately, for the plan represented an “objective” survey of Iran, it showed the “pathological” and abnormality of Iran’s economic structure, and it prescribed a “scientific” method to fix the problem.

Kermit Roosevelt, who was also one of the principal planners of the 1953 CIA coup, wrote the final draft of the plan, which became the first development plan in Iran’s modern history. In later years, the plan became the basis for establishing the Plan Organization (PO), which, until 1979, constituted the organization for producing knowledge in state-building projects.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Bostock and Jones, *Planning and Power in Iran: Ebtehaj and Economic Development under the Shah*, pp. 94-99.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>10</sup> Keddie and Richard, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, p. 122.

As expected, the framework of the plan was in accordance with the American discourse of development in those years. The plan emphasized four points: (a) invest in technology and education; (b) privatize state ownership of industries; (c) focus on light rather than heavy industries; and (d) improve profit incentives in order to advance management quality, increase production, and raise productivity.<sup>11</sup>

This plan contrasted with alternative epistemic knowledge that the Soviet Union was producing at the time, and it was sharply different from the knowledge that Islamic and democratic nationalists were producing. Hence, the knowledge produced by the Plan Organization was competing with other knowledge produced by the United States, each one with a different objective and rationality. For example, while American developmental models focused on small and mid-size projects, the Soviet developmental model prioritized large state-owned heavy industries. The communist Tudeh Party devalued the liberal model of industrialization and called it the “light” assembly industrialization (*sanat-ih muntag*), arguing that the designed was to benefit the West rather than Iran. In contrast, the Tudeh Party valued the Soviets’ model, which called for “heavy” or “mother” industries.<sup>12</sup> In other words, “light” industrialization was considered bad, but “heavy” was good; “assembly” industries were bad, but “mother” industries were good. Interestingly, this is the language that Reza Shah, his son, the Tudeh, and the Islamic Republic shared, that is, “mother” industries are considered “real” and “good,” but “assembly” and “light” industries are the code words for economic weakness and dependence.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, Ali Moarefi, "The Iranian Seven Year Plan and Its Monetary Effects" (Thesis--Georgetown University, 1950).

<sup>12</sup> For more information, see Keddie and Richard, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, p. 122.

However, the plan was doomed from the start because it privileged security over other contending signifiers. Accordingly, although both Reza and Mohamad Reza Shah valued economic development, they wanted absolute control over state resources. Hence, the plan was doomed for its internal contradictions. Ironically, Mohamad Reza Shah's regime valued the rhetoric of liberal economic development, but the state-elites practiced state-centered economic politics.

Nikki Keddie argues, "The Plan's scant accomplishment during its first year brought criticism."<sup>13</sup> While those with political connections to Mohamad Reza Shah and *Majlis* largely supported and benefited from the plan, some constitutionalists, Islamists, and socialists criticized the plan by blaming "the United States and Britain for backing men who cared little for Iran's economic development."<sup>14</sup> Additionally, socialists in the Tudeh "attacked the plan and its foreign advisors" for the Tudeh understood the plan as a means to further penetration of American imperialism into Iran.<sup>15</sup> In less than a year, the plan's failure became obvious.

The Overseas Consultants, Inc. blamed the failure on "the old, corrupt forces" operating in Iran. This, representation should have been expected since the image of Iranians as corrupt and incompetent, as opposed to the objective, honest, and competent Americans, was a prevalent feature of these discussions. But the OCI did not blame itself for aiming to liberalize the economy without liberalizing the polity, for it feared the spread of communism.<sup>16</sup> In this context, security signified the meaning of, and criterion for, how developmental planning was designed. This securitization made it impossible for planners to conceive the possibility of dismantling the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>16</sup> Bostock and Jones, *Planning and Power in Iran: Ebtehaj and Economic Development under the Shah*, P. 102.

institutional legacy of modern absolutism inherited from Reza Shah's era and continued to operate in the country. As a result, the attempt was made to liberalize the economy without tackling the issue of polity. In other words, since security was the governing statement for U.S.-Iran relations, it shaped the way various aid packages were designed.

In his 1949 trip to Washington, through his envoys, Mohammad Reza Shah communicated that he was more interested in military than economic aid. According to Frances Bostock and Geoffrey Jones, the Shah's preference "caused confusion in Washington and consternation in Tehran."<sup>17</sup> But the confusion in Washington disappeared when Eisenhower became president and securitized Iran even further. In later years, Mohammad Reza Shah began to blame the failure of the plan on Mussadiq, which was a different source of corruption than the OCI had blamed.

Mohammad Reza Shah argued that Mussadiq's "negative policies led straight to the sort of political and economic chaos which foreign agents [Tudeh members] found ideal for their purposes." In other words, the shah did not conceive of the possibility of failure because of the institutional legacy of modern absolutism,<sup>18</sup> but he blamed Mussadiq's policy of nationalizing the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC).

However, Keddie correctly rejected these representations and concluded, "It is often said that the cutting off Anglo-IOC royalties finished the Plan, but its de facto demise was assured before oil nationalization."<sup>19</sup> Keddie argued, "The assumption that development was possible and desirable without a basic change in social [political] structure fundamentally weakened planning [economic development] in Iran."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Mohammed Reza, *Mission for My Country*, 126.

<sup>18</sup> Keddie and Richard, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Mohammed Reza, *Mission for My Country*, 126.

However, what Keddie saw as the necessity of economic and political liberalization and/or democratization, Mohamad Reza Shah perceived as the threat of nationalism and communism. Mohamad Reza Shah articulated his thought in later years: “Nationalism, like imperialism, is a tricky notion. In its true form, nationalism can lead a country to greatness. For example . . . America’s notable progress, and my father’s . . . amazing achievements . . . which was due to . . . the pure spirit of nationalism instinctive to our [Iranian] people.”<sup>21</sup> He then argued that while his father had eradicated imperialism and promoted a “true” Iranian nationalism, Mussadiq’s “irrational, emotional temperament” had provided conducive conditions for communism and an “immature nationalism” . . . when we [Iranians] were in an irrational phase” of our history.<sup>22</sup> Mohamad Reza Shah continued linking his brand of nationalism, which prioritized security, as “true nationalism and patriotism.”

In sum, security permeated the meanings of how the state development was imagined, designed, and practiced. In a rationalistic world, it would have been expected that because the shah had experienced the fragile nature of his father’s absolutist state, he would not have continued the process of othering local and national forces while increasing his reliance on the coercive forces of the state equipped and financed by the United States. However, in the imagined world of reality, he did what his father had done and failed—the securitization of the state at the expense of othering all other competing identities.

### **Political Development**

Mohamad Reza Shah represented and understood political development in terms of consolidation of power, which he personified. The Shah vigorously guarded his absolute control

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>22</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 246.

over the military. He acquiesced in an alliance with the United States and strengthened the military. He also pardoned officers who had deserted their posts during the Allied invasion, lobbied to preserve military spending, solicited military aid from the United States, and even spent some of his own inherited fortune to please military officers. As expected, security signified the basis of an ideal political order and the focus of an obsession for building a loyal military.

As such, any political development that would weaken the Shah's personalistic control over the state military and/or bureaucracy would be interpreted as a threat against the shah-centered state. This drive to consolidate power picked up speed as the Cold War began. By 1950, Mohamad Reza Shah nearly reestablished the absolutist control that his father had once enjoyed. For example, *Khandaniha*, a weekly digest, printed the picture of Mohamad Reza Shah appearing in public: "Once in 1942-46; once again in 1943-1944, twice in 1944-45; twelve times in 1945-46; and eighteen times, seventeen of them in military uniform, in 1947-1948."<sup>23</sup> In other words, as the state was consolidating its power, Mohamad Reza Shah was taking more personal control of the state. After the Russians withdrew their forces in 1946, "Iran's social and economic problems intensified, as did social conflicts and foreign interference."<sup>24</sup> But Mohamad Reza Shah pushed to complete his control and command of the state intensified.

By the end of October 1949, to the dismay of both the United States and Britain, Mohamad Reza Shah's control and command over the state was as absolute as that of his father, Reza Shah. By then, he had achieved it by the same means—violating the constitution, breaking legislative

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<sup>23</sup> Keddie and Richard, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, p. 110.

<sup>24</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 249.



precedents, manipulating elections, using legal and illegal means, and utilizing the military and police to intimidate, deport, imprison, and kill opponents.<sup>25</sup>

More interesting, however, was the way these practices were constructed as the threat of international communism, fanatical Islamism, and immature nationalism by the shah-centered state. For example, in February 1949, a failed assassination attempt became the platform for representing the shah-centered state against internal and external enemies. Mohamad Reza Shah represented the event as a conspiracy with three connections to Islamists, communists, and the British. In the officially-approved newspapers, such as *Ettellaat and Kayhan*, the story of assassination was portrayed as: (a) the event was a conspiracy planned by the Tudeh as the agent of international communism; (b) the would-be assassin was an ignorant agent of “the most backward religious fanatics;” and (c) the British were involved because the girlfriend of the would-be assassin “was the daughter of the gardener that worked in the British embassy.”<sup>26</sup> This event became the platform for further securitization of the state, which resulted in the implementation of a series of repressive actions. Mohamad Reza Shah declared martial law, closed major newspapers, arrested Islamic, nationalists, and communist leaders, outlawed the Tudeh party, deported Ayatollah Kashani to Beirut, and forced Mussadiq to remain at his village-estate. According to Abrahamian:

The shah acted quickly to crush all the opposition. He declared martial law throughout the country, closed down all the main newspapers critical of the court, outlawed the Tudeh, deported Kashani to Beirut, confined Mussadiq to his estates, and tried to implicate even Qavam [prime minister in 1950] in the conspiracy. What is more, the shah promptly convened a Constituent Assembly. Elected under martial law, the assembly unanimously

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<sup>25</sup> State Department to the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, 1 February 1949, *Foreign Relations of United States* (Washington, D.C., 1949), 6, 476; also quoted in Mohammed Reza, *Answer to History*, pp. 57-59.

<sup>26</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 249.

voted to create a Senate, half of whose members would be nominated by the monarch, and granted the shah the right to dissolve Parliament whenever he wished.<sup>27</sup>

All of these actions, once again, were done in the name of establishing “order and security.”<sup>28</sup>

By 1949, the drive to absolutism alarmed even the U.S. State Department, which “felt that the shah ignored the [U.S.] military advisors, hastily changed the constitution, was obsessed with tanks, and unrealistically dreamed of \$500 million in economic aid and \$200 million in military aid to finance an eventual army of 300,000.”<sup>29</sup> In October 1949, the shah was prepared to travel to the United States during a time when U.S. support for him was waning while his appetite for more military aid was growing.<sup>30</sup> At this time, voices of dissent in the United States were beginning to criticize the shah’s increasingly autocratic rule while questioning the usefulness of increasing American military and financial aid. Attuned to American political currents more than political dissent in his own country, the shah represented the threat of communism, Islamic fanaticism, and nationalism as a way to convince his American audience as to why he desperately needed more military aid than economic assistance.

On February 10, 1950, *The New York Times*, reflecting the consolidation of power in the hands of the shah, wrote, “Circumstances surrounding the session of the newly elected Parliament that opened yesterday indicate that this Parliament's attitude will decide whether Iran is to have a dictatorship.”<sup>31</sup> Despite these debates in the United States, the shah continued to

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>28</sup> For example, see the proceeding reports of the 15<sup>th</sup> Majlis in February and March of 1949.

<sup>29</sup> Walter H. Waggoner, "Iran's Shah to Ask Assistance in U.S.; Monarch, Due on Wednesday, Expected to Express Need for Millitary, Economic, Aid," *The New York Times*, Nov., 13, 1949.

<sup>30</sup> Albion Ross, "Iran Parliament Faces Power Test; Packed by 1,000 Families,' Its Attitude Will Determine If Dictatorship Is Set Up," *The New York Times*, Feb. 11 1950. Also see, Ross, "Iran Parliament Faces Power Test; Packed by 1,000 Families,' Its Attitude Will Determine If Dictatorship Is Set Up."

<sup>31</sup> Editorial, "The Fire Is Rekindled," *The Fire (Atash)* 1946.

receive full U.S. support, for both the United States and the shah, security from the threat of communism, Islamism, and Iranian democratic nationalism permeated the meaning of economic and political development. Meanwhile, the shah was beginning to lose the collective imagination of Iranians to another security threat—the construction of the common threat of Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, which is the subject of Chapter 5.

In sum, the economic and political developments were driven by the fear of communism, Islamism, and nationalism. In this era, the United States produced the knowledge for Iran's developmental plan, and the shah-centered state adopted it without actually liberalizing either the economy or politics. Nevertheless, the United States went along with Mohamad Reza Shah's modern absolutism and his consolidation of power. For both the United States and Mohamad Reza Shah, security from communist constituted the main signifier in their political discourses. While the construction of a common threat made the Iran's acquiescent alliance with the United States possible, it made compromise with socialist, Islamist, and nationalist opposition impossible. To compromise or enter into a dialogue with these contending discourses meant the deconstruction of the very signifier (security) that made the shah's policies and practices meaningful.

### **Imagination of the Nation**

With the fall of Reza Shah and the temporary loss of absolutism, the nation that Mohamad Reza Shah imagined remained much the same as the one his father had imagined. But some shifts also occurred. Unlike his father, who represented himself as a no-nonsense, tough, and disciplinarian patriarch, the son represented himself as Western-educated and a progressive democrat, who respected law, adhered to Islamic norms, and sympathized with the plight of what he called "my people," which in the discourse of modern absolutism meant being the "subject" of the shah. However, much like his father, his ideal typical model of nationalism was an abstract

model of Western-like nationalism. In a series of conceptual linkages and differences, nationalism was linked to Persian glories: the Persian glories to Persian nationalism, the Persian nationalism to the naturalization of a historical mission assumed by all leaders and the shah, the mission to a divine design, the divine design to Shi'ism, Persian monarchism, and so forth. These relational linkages were then counterpoised to another series of linkages such as Iran's backwardness that was linked to words, such as Arabs, non-Persians, Russians, communists, "bad" Muslims, and nationalists. According to this logic, in this era, a citizen subject was imagined as one who revered the king (*Shah Doost*), worshiped Iran (*Iran Parast*), glorified Persian heritage and language, and wanted to revive Iran's ancient glory to match the developmental stages of Western countries. An *Irani* was considered a devout but "modern" Muslim. Relatedly, a *Khareji* was represented as one who was anti-shah and thus did not properly revere the 2500-year history of Persian monarchy.

As Reza Shah had previously done, Mohamad Reza Shah imagined a historic nation of Persians against non-Persians. Texts embedded in modern absolutism were imbued with references to the glories of Persian empires, the sweetness of the Persian language, the superiority of Persian ethics, and the perseverance of Persian culture. This body of knowledge had entered the official language during Reza Shah's era, and it remained in texts as uncontested historical facts. Embedded in this body of knowledge, even opposing identities utilized the glorification of ancient history to illustrate the weakness and corrupt nature of the present.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, in some circles, questioning the glory of the past was interpreted as an anti-Iranian (*zed*

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<sup>32</sup> See Queen Suraya, "New Year Messages," *Ittial'lat* Mar. 28, 1953, p. 12.

*Irani*). Similarly, many of the nationalists also identified with the sub-discourse of Pan Persianism.<sup>33</sup> I will discuss this point further in Chapter 5.

In this era, Muslims were classified into two categories: “Good” Muslims were considered as pro-development, Western-like, Western-dressed, pro-shah, and anti-communist; “bad” Muslims were considered as fanatical, anti-development, and anti-shah. Bad Muslims were represented as close-minded, superstitious, crude, and pre-modern people. Phrases and words, such as “fallen-behind” (*aqab uftad-ih*), “fanatical” (*fanatic*), “traditional” (*sunati*), “superstitious” (*khurafati*) and “religious dogmatism” (*khushk mazhab*) described bad Muslims. Additionally, bad Muslims were represented as Arab-like rather than Iranian or Western-like. This logic of differentiation and categorization between good and bad Muslims continued throughout the reign of the second Pahlavi, Mohamad Reza Shah.

This differentiation between good and bad was very prominent throughout the reign of Mohamad Reza Shah. In this dichotomization, good clerics visited the shah, supported the shah’s anti-communist campaign, and refrained from political activities. Chapter 5 will discuss this phenomenon further.

The dichotomization of good and bad Muslims also included women. Good Muslim women remained unveiled and Western-like in appearance, but weak and Eastern-like in their behavior. Mohamad Reza Shah promoted this view of women throughout his reign. For him, the

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<sup>33</sup> For example, the Pan-Iranist Party, which was first led by Mushin Pizishkhpour and Dariysh Furuhar, primarily identified with the identity of Persianism. Historically, the party was a pro-German party, but between 1941 and 1951, its main objective was fighting the Tudeh Party and communism through the representation of communists as *kharejian*. When Mussadiq’s oil nationalization struggle became the primary national issue differentiating the *Irani/Khareji*, the party became a pro-Mussadiq Party. However, Mussadiq was gradually re-represented as pro-communist, and thus a *Khareji*, the party’s position changed again. Then, Pizishkhpour, who led the party, became an ardent supporter of the shah absolutism even though it was a known fact that the shah was receiving help from both the United States and Britain. But Furuhar deviated from the Pan-Iranist party line and continued identifying with Mussadiq as an Iranian nationalist and constitutionalist. In 1997, Furuhar and his wife were stabbed to death by some agents in the Information Ministry of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The accusation was that Furuhar was associated with *Kharejian*.

model for modern Muslim women was a particular image of a woman best portrayed by his various queens. They all were multilingual, had upper-level degrees from Western educational institutions, lived and grew up in Europe, knew various dignitaries, and frequently attended political, social, and cultural events. For example, in March 1953, on the occasion of celebrating the Iranian New Year of 1332/1953, in a series of events, the king and the queen Suraya represented ideal images of good and modern Muslim Iranians. They returned from their vacation to Tehran to attend various New Year ceremonies, and they both addressed the nation. The queen's address was particularly modern yet it would have been impossible in previous eras when Iranian queens were not heard or seen in public. Besides, at any given time in Iranian history, the king had too many queens so addressing the nation by hundreds of queens would have been unimaginable. Nevertheless, the queen addressed the nation as if this has always been a natural and historical act:

My dear compatriots, from the bottom of my heart, I congratulate this magnificent and ancient holiday, which is the cherished memory of our ancestors. One of the good deeds of this beloved heritage is what our forefathers have taught us. They taught us that after thanking the blessing of God, we must renew our commitment to our God. Then, with God's willing, kindness, and blessing, we must clean our conscious from impurities and renew our desire to begin a New Year while we obligate ourselves to give to the poor, care for the sick, aid the disabled, assist each other, and participate in the social welfare of the country. If we do these good deeds, then God will bless us and help us unite the country for a good and happy New Year, which will be waiting for the intelligent nation of Iranians.<sup>34</sup>

In this text, while the queen reminds the nation of their beloved Iranian heritage, an idealized version which never existed, her multiple references to God are deeply embedded in Islamic understanding of God. She includes herself as a part of "we the people," that is, these people are empowered, modern, intelligent, and ethical. These people can renew, commit, and obligate themselves. These people are good to others and thus good for the social welfare of the

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<sup>34</sup> Suraya, "New Year Messages."

country. After both the shah and the queen addressed the nation, the royal couple visited a girls' vocational school in Tehran and donated 360 school uniforms. This act was not only an Islamic act of benevolence, but also an act of a modern patriarch, as was expected of him. For the occasion, the shah also took his private plane to the holy shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad. Out of respect for Islamic scholarship, the shah also received some of the grand *ulama* in his Marble Palace. The photographs of all these public appearances were widely published in major daily papers—the shah and the queen were modern, Muslim, and Iranian patriots who interpreted Islam in accordance to their own individual beliefs and discretions. Although they sought worldly pleasures, plentitude, progress, and high social status, they remained the blessed servants of God in a holy mission to modernize the country.<sup>35</sup> In short, the shah and the queen were “good, modern Muslims,” and this was a clear shift in the modernists' representation of Islam. In other words, the discourse of modern absolutism was defining the meaning of Islamic values.

One of these shifts in meaning was in the way charity was represented and understood. In Islamic discourses, charity was a virtuous value associated with men, done in private domain, and performed inconspicuously. However, all of the shah's queens did their charity works conspicuously and publicly. In fact, in contrast to Islamic charities, the queen's striking beauty combined with careful stagecraft, emphasized the performative aspects of charity. In these practices, modernism had permeated the Islamic discourse of charity. In other words, Iranian queens were represented as good Muslims, but also modern, Western, beautiful, and fashionable. These practices were repeated in commercial advertisements in which Iranian housewives looked more like the shah's wives than Eastern looking Iranian housewives normally did. Through a review of hundreds of advertisements in various newspapers, I did not find even one commercial

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<sup>35</sup> "The King and Queen Visit a Girl School " *Ettelaat* March 28, 1953.

advertisement that depicted a veiled Iranian woman—as if they did not exist even as consumers.<sup>36</sup>

The same trend could be seen in the growing movie industry. According to Hamid Dabashi, “Not until the advent of the Islamic Revolution and the active ‘Islamization’ of the cinema, did women appear veiled in motion pictures.”<sup>37</sup> The general texts showed unveiled women as educated, modern, and articulate. In contrast, veiled women were represented as traditional, motherly, and inarticulate. Moreover, it was unthinkable to imagine that a female employee of the state or even a private firm would have veiled women employees. In fact, working women were equated with being modern, mobile, fashion-conscious, Western-like, educated, and wealthy. Conversely, being a traditional woman was equated with being veiled, homebound, religious, uneducated, and traditional.

Nevertheless, in the discourse of modern absolutism, women remained as weak, irrational, and emotional to be protected by their respective patriarchs. In a passing statement referring to Mussadiq, his greatest rival before Ayatollah Khomeini, Mohamad Reza Shah suggested, “Mussadiq and his followers cried like women and indulged in hysterical tirades.”<sup>38</sup> In an interview with Oriana Fallaci, he suggested that women were created to be beautiful, charming, and comforting to men, for they do not have the ability to become Michelangelo, Bach, or even a great chef.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Dabashi, *Iran: A People Interrupted*, p. 20.

<sup>37</sup> Mohammed Reza, *Mission for My Country*, p. 126.

<sup>38</sup> Oriana Fallaci, *Interview with History*, 1st ed. (New York: Liveright, 1976), pp. 270-272.

<sup>39</sup> Mohammed Reza, *Mission for My Country*, p. 298.



## Foreign Relations

### The Foreign in Foreign Policy

During the colonial competition in Iran, all politics began in foreign embassies, and all local politics had a foreign policy dimension. Since that time, all contending political discourses in Iran have identified their enemies as “foreigners,” and this era was no exception. In other words, in the existing political spaces in Iran, it was inconceivable to imagine politics independent of foreign intervention.

In the discourse of modern absolutism, the United States and its Western allies constituted Self, and communists, democratic nationalists, and Islamists constituted the Other. As Reza Shah had imagined Germany as a Self-like Aryan nation and thus a natural ally, the young shah perceived the United States as a Self-like Western nation and thus a natural ally. Referring to America, Britain, Canada, and France, he wrote, “Our cultural relations with the Western democracies go back many centuries; our ties with those people are no sudden growth. Culturally, the West has borrowed extensively from us, and by choice, we have absorbed much that is Western. Today, we have the same basic goals.”<sup>40</sup> Additionally, as natural allies are supposed to do, the shah expected the United States to protect his state from the threat of what he called the threat of “international communism.” He argued that for developing countries such as Iran, security “is their first essential for advancement,”<sup>41</sup> and the Middle East needed not only a “Marshal Plan,” but also a “security shield comparable with NATO. . . . If a country fails to secure its defenses, the Communists play with it as a cat does with a mouse.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, for the young shah, the communists were both domestic and international enemies, and the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 296.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 293, 296.

<sup>42</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, pp. 173-176.

United States was Self-like and thus a natural ally. For the shah, the U.S. Self-likeness was historical and cultural; for his father, the German Self-likeness was racial. In other words, neither geographical nor political intervention constituted the meaning of “foreign” in foreignness. Instead, the “foreignness” of foreigners was conceptualized and constituted as a relational difference in which the Self was represented, understood, and behaved in opposition to the Other. Relatedly, it was, and still is, natural to label one’s political opposition as “foreign” or “foreign agents.”

However, classifying one’s political opposition as “foreigner” was a particular representation that every generation of Iranians since the constitutional revolution had experienced vis-à-vis occupation, domination, and intervention. This era was no exception.

The end of Reza Shah’s regime was the beginning of occupation, domination, and/or intervention into Iranian politics by Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States. With the occupation and intervention of the Allies, the body politic of Iran, which was kept together by the absolutist power of Reza Shah for sixteen years, fragmented into pieces. Tribal, religious, and ethnic factionalism returned once again. Tribal chiefs began to seize their confiscated tribal lands and reestablish their previous authorities.<sup>43</sup> Tribal and provincial forces began to challenge, and, in some cases defeat, the military. Once more, the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan (*Ferqeh-yi Demukra’t Azerbaijan*) was established, as was the Democratic Party of Kurdistan. The demands for these two parties ranged from wanting total independence to calling for a certain degree of local autonomy. Additionally, an unprecedented number of political organizations, representing various identities, sprung up.

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<sup>43</sup> Amjad, *Iran: From Royal Dictatorship to Theocracy*, p. . 53.

In this chaotic situation, three coalition forces converged to shape Iranian politics—Britain, the Soviet Union, the United States—and their respective internal actors. Britain and the Soviet began fostering groups sympathetic to their respective interests, and they arrested, killed, and deported individuals opposing their respective interests. Meanwhile, the United States invested in the shah’s military and police.

On the one hand, Britain began supporting the Fatherland Party led by Sayed Zia, a known pro-British politician. Sayed Zia’s appealed to his *bazaaris* and hooligan constituents by representing the threat of the Tudeh Party and communism, the threat of the shah’s military dictatorship backed by landed elites, and the threat of Western intellectualism to Islam.<sup>44</sup>

On the other hand, the Soviet Union supported the Tudeh Party and the Azerbaijan and Kurdistan democratic parties. These parties represented the shah, the landed elites, Sayed Zia and their respective foreign supporters as the threat to socialism and self-determination.

In the meantime, the United States began to invest in Mahd Reza Shah’s military, and the Shah was very eager to reciprocate—a natural alliance that was born then and continued until the fall of Mohamad Reza Shah. By 1944, the U.S. advisory position in the military, the economy, the police, and gendarmerie (rural police) was a prominent feature of Iranian politics.<sup>45</sup> General Hassan Arfa, Iran’s former chief of staff, explained why the shah wanted to involve the United States. He wrote, “Our policy was to bring as many Americans as possible to Iran”<sup>46</sup> The goal was to deter the Soviet Union from interfering in the internal affairs of Iran.

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<sup>44</sup> For example, Sayed Zia al-Din Taba-Tabai, Reza Shah’s ally in the 1921 coup, was a pro-British activist who helped organized the Party of Justice (*Hezb-e Edalat*) and the Party National Will (*Hezb-e Eradeh-ye Meli*). He tried to mobilize the masses by utilizing politics of hate, his base was the *bazzaris*, his ethos was Islamic, but his messages were anti-communism, anti-intellectualism, anti-tax reforms, anti-court, and anti-shah , and anti-Soviet.

<sup>45</sup> Hassan Arfa, *Under Five Shahs* (New York,: W. Morrow, 1965), p. 272.

<sup>46</sup> "Asnadi Az Asl-I Chahar-I Turuman Dar Iran (1325-1346 H.Sh.) = Documents on Truman's Point Four in Iran (1946-1967)," (Tihir\*an: Vizarat-i Farhang va Irshad-i Islami, 1382).

In other words, contending discourses interpreted their foreign enemies and their domestic agents according to their own self-referential conditions of conceivability. For Sayed Zia the Mohamad Reza Shah and communists were agents of the United States and the Soviet Union. For the communists and separatists, Sayed Zia and Mohamed Reza Shah were agents of Britain and America. For Mohamad Reza Shah and modern absolutists, Sayed Zia, the Tudeh, nationalists, and Islamists were agents of foreigners. Meanwhile, the meaning of “foreign” in foreignness had a varied impact for different people. The notion that a domestic opposition must have some kind of connection with a foreign power still pervades Iranian politics.

### **Foreign Policy**

During World War II, Iran had no foreign policy because the Allies dictated it, but as the war ended, the competition to steer Iran’s foreign policy toward the three main foreign contenders and their respective domestic coalitions began. Reflecting the convergence of foreign and domestic interests during the war, the cabinet, the *Majlis*, and the court participated in the conduct of foreign policy. When the war ended, the court, in alliance with the United States, began to become the most important actor in shaping Iran’s foreign policymaking until 1951, when Mussadiq took over the government for 27 months (see Chapter 5). Nevertheless, during this era (1941-1951), a majority of constitutionalists, democratic nationalists, and even some Islamists supported the Iran-U.S. alliance, for it was inconceivable to imagine the United States as a “foreign” state and thus an enemy. In the collective memory of Iranians, the United States, unlike the Soviet and Britain, was not associated with any of the known local or traditional political actors or parties. Additionally, except for the Tudeh Party, President Truman’s Four

Point Program, which offered economic aid to Iran, created a political space in which imagining the United States as a belligerent foreign enemy was not possible.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, unlike Britain and the Soviet Union, the United States did not have political infrastructure on the ground, so it primarily invested in the Mohamad Reza Shah's military and police, and the Shah reciprocated—and an acquiescent alliance with the United States was created. This alliance was so vital to the survival of the Shah that he became an extension of the U.S. foreign policymaking in the region. In other words, the combination of rhetoric, policies, and practices constituted the making of an acquiescent alliance between the Shah and the United States, which was not initially contested by the other contending discourses. However, in later years, this alliance took on a life of its own and turned into the basis for differentiating the Shah and the United States on one side and all other contending discourses on the opposite side.

In this era, both the United States and Mohamad Reza Shah signified the Soviet Union as a security threat, and this did not contradict how Islamists, nationalists, and constitutionalists securitized the Soviet Union, albeit with a different interpretation. Thus, the securitization of the Soviet Union was linked in a series of other relational links, for example, separatism to non-Persianism, non-Persianism to communism, communism to atheism, and atheism to immorality, chaos, and foreign enemies.<sup>48</sup> In 1945, the first battle of the Cold War took place within the context of multiple political spaces gathered into two camps.

On one side of this camp were the Soviet Union, the Tudeh Party, the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan, the Democratic Party of Kurdistan, and their respective constituents. In this camp, the Soviet Union refused to pull its troops out of Iran, as was required by the Tehran Treaty of

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<sup>47</sup> For more information on the Point Four Program, see Barry Buzan, "Rethinking Security after the Cold War," *Cooperation and Conflict* 32, no. 1 (1995).

<sup>48</sup> For the concept of securitization, see Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, pp. 226-260.

1943, in the name of wanting to protect democratic movements in Kurdistan and Azerbaijan. The Soviet Union supported the Tudeh Party as the main voice of Iranian people, and it claimed the right for having an oil concession for the northern fields.<sup>49</sup>

On the other side of this camp were Britain, the United States, Mohamad Reza Shah, Islamists, nationalists, and their respective constituencies who feared the Soviet Union and the growing influence of the Tudeh. In fact, the most critical threat to the British interest until 1946 was a strike led by Tudeh in the southern oil fields, which seriously threatened British interests.<sup>50</sup> Britain began to consolidate its military assets in the south and started mobilizing Bakhtiari tribes. It brought more troops to the Persian Gulf and threatened to land its troops. Concomitantly, the United States intensified its supply of arms to Mohamad Reza Shah and put pressure on Prime Minister Qavam's government.<sup>51</sup> All these practices were represented as the reaction to the threat imposed by the Soviet Union *vis-a-vis* its proxy, the Tudeh Party.

For Iranians, however, these representations were the same old politics of foreign competition for the control of Iran's resources. Qavam's cabinet followed what had been traditionally understood as the policy of positive equilibrium (*muvaazeneh musbat*), which meant playing the interests of one power against the other—a text born out of, and embedded in, the context of colonial competition in Iran. Following this policy, Qavam appealed to the Russians by allowing and encouraging the Tudeh Party to freely participate in its political activities. Qavam went as far as arresting some of the Tudeh's right wing opposition. He entered into negotiation with the separatists by promising them a certain degree of local autonomy, for

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<sup>49</sup> Mostafa Elm, *Oil, Power, and Principle: Iran's Oil Nationalization and Its Aftermath*, 1st ed., Contemporary Issues in the Middle East (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1992), ch. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 225-231.

example, allowing education in local languages. More importantly, he signed an agreement to grant the Soviet Union the concession of oil fields in the north subject to the *Majlis* confirmation.<sup>52</sup> “While offering the Soviets and oil concession, Qavam tried to reassure the Americans by proposing to them an equivalent concession in the southeast and by renewing the U.S. military mission.”<sup>53</sup> However, immediately after the Soviet troops pulled out of Iran, the government troops brutally repressed the separatist movements. The government banned the Tudeh Party, and the *Majlis* never approved the oil concessions.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, in 1947, with the help of Qavam and Mussadiq, the *Majlis* passed legislation that barred the government from entering into any negotiation for giving concessions to foreign governments.<sup>55</sup> In the end, Qavam claimed, and many people agreed, that he had played off the threat of the Soviets against that of the British and had won the game. Meanwhile, the shah also claimed victory.

Nevertheless, the representation and interpretation of these events differed among various identities. The shah represented the 1947 Soviet troop withdrawal as a military victory brought about by his prudent military alliance with the United States. Until 1979, the shah celebrated this move as a historical victory for Iranian sovereignty. He claimed that the victory was on account of his military power, which implicitly legitimized the United States as a reliable military alliance. This “victory” was represented as a military victory that had restored order, security, and sovereignty to the country. The shah claimed that he had “saved Azerbaijan” and thus the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Elm, *Oil, Power, and Principle: Iran's Oil Nationalization and Its Aftermath*.

<sup>55</sup> Mohammed Reza, *Mission for My Country*, p. 124.

“fatherland” from foreign traitors and communist spies.<sup>56</sup> This “victory day” was celebrated with much fanfare until the fall of the Pahlavi dynasty.

In contrast to the Shah, constitutionalists and nationalists in the *Majlis* represented the victory as a legal victory. They argued that the victory had become possible by Qavam convincing the Soviets that he would lobby the *Majlis* on their behalf. This maneuver would have been impossible without a legal and functional *Majlis*, constitutionalists argued. Moreover, they argued that Qavam had cleverly utilized the *Majlis* to make a positive equilibrium (*muvažen-ya musbat*) between the British and the Soviets. Accordingly, constitutionalists believed that having a functional *Majlis* in charge of making treaties gave legal sanction to ruling elites to pit one power against the other. Qavam made this point in a 1949 letter from Paris to the shah as the shah was in the midst of his most aggressive move to reduce the role of the *Majlis*. In his letter, Prime Minister Qavam reminded the shah that the 1946-1947 negotiation with the Soviets would have failed had it not been for the *Majlis* and the constitution. He strongly advised against further weakening of the constitution, urging that it would not only threaten the national interest but also endanger the Pahlavi dynasty. For that advice, the shah took away Qavam’s title (*ashraf* or eminent), which he had given to him for negotiating the Soviet withdrawal in 1947.<sup>57</sup>

However, as power shifted from the cabinet and the *Majlis* to the shah, foreign policy shifted from the concept of positive equilibrium to what the shah, in later years, called the policy of “positive nationalism,” which essentially meant the shah’s acquiescent alliance with the United States and its allies. Nevertheless, the articulation of the shah’s concept of “positive nationalism” was possible only in the context of Mussadiq’s foreign policy of negative

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<sup>56</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, pp. 225-231.

<sup>57</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject : Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).



equilibrium, which meant non-alignment and was counterpoised to the traditional doctrine of positive equilibrium. In fact, the doctrine of positive nationalism was the mirror image of the Tudeh Party's acquiescent alliance for the Soviet policy. But the Tudeh called its foreign policy "internationalism," which presupposed an acquiescent alliance with the Soviet Union.

In short, through policies and practices, the discourse of modern absolutism constructed the "foreign" in foreign policy. In this era, with the consolidation of power in the hands of Mohamad Reza Shah, the discourse of modern absolutism linked communists, nationalists, and Islamists together as "foreigners."

### **Conclusion**

In this era (1941-51), the Allies invaded Iran and forced the abdication of Reza Shah. As Reza Shah's regime of modern absolutism fell apart, various discourses once again struggled for state building, nation imaging, and conducting foreign relations. While constitutionalists and modernists mainly dominated the state, Islamists, socialists, and nationalists opposed the state and competed to establish their own ideal political order. Although this era was marred by chaos, disorder, and conflict, it was also the only era in modern Iranian history when freedom of expression was not and could not be suppressed. In this era, contending discourses were able to construct values that have remained in the language (see Chapters 5 and 6).

For example, in state-building, had it not been for the discourse of development in Iran, it would not have been possible for the Shah to imagine the United States as a natural ally that could have helped his country to develop. Had it not been for the American produced power and knowledge, it would not have been possible for the construction of an acquiescent alliance between Mohamad Reza Shah and the United States (as will be discussed in Chapter 6 ).

In nation imagining, had it not been for the discourse of Islam, it would not have been possible for Mohamad Reza Shah to represent himself as a "good" Muslim as opposed to "bad"

Muslims whose ignorance would threaten Iran, Islam, and historical development (Chapter 6). Furthermore, had it not been for the discourse of Shi'ism, it would not have been possible for the Mohamad Reza Shah to represent himself as a devout Shi'ite and a modern king (Chapter 6). developmental model. Had it not been for the discourse absolutism, it would have been impossible for the shah to represent himself as the linkage between "Iranian instinctive nationalism" and security of the fatherland.

In foreign policy, the articulatory practice of the Shah's acquiescent alliance with the United States would not have been conceivable, had it not been for the construction of the threat of communism. Relatedly, the articulatory practice of imagining the Soviets as a communist threat would have been inconceivable, had it not been for the logic of relational linkages. For example, discursively, the linkages among communism and the Soviets; the Soviets with the Russians; the Russians with colonialism; the colonialism with interventions; the intervention of the Soviet Union with the Tudeh; the Tudeh with separatists; the separatists with non-Persians; the non-Persians with foreigners; and foreigners with the Soviet Union.<sup>58</sup> In this tautological circle, the Persian Self understood itself in its opposition to its non-Persian foreign other associated with existential narratives in the language. In other words, in the discourse of modern absolutism, "we the Persians" was understood in opposition to "those communists," but both the "we" and "them" could be understood only in the context of contending discourses in Iran. Moreover, the articulatory practice of imagining the Soviets as an atheistic threat would not have been possible, had it not been for Iranians linking Soviets with Russians, Russians with Christianity, Christianity with non-Muslim rule, non-Muslim rule with colonialism, and colonialism with un-Islamic rule of others. In this tautology, the Muslim-Iranian Self understood

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<sup>58</sup> For more information of indirect rule and colonialism, see Homa Katouzian, *Musaddiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris 1990), p. 66.

itself in opposition to the non-Muslim foreign Other. In Chapter 5, I will discuss how the discourse of democratic nationalism prioritized people rather than security, which gave meaning to how security, development, law, class, and Islam were interpreted.

## CHAPTER 5 DEMOCRATIC NATIONALISM (1951-53)

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I will narrate the rise and fall of the Mussadiq era (1951-1953). The official state discourse in this era became the discourse of “democratic nationalism.” This chapter will also examine the formation of the basic signifiers in the discourse of democratic nationalism. Through examination of texts, I will demonstrate how the shift in official state discourse was represented, understood, and practiced. I will demonstrate how a particular formation of “people”—as a primary signifier of this discourse—permeated the meaning of security, development, law, class, and Islam. The state’s projects of state building, nation imagining, and conducting foreign policy reflected the values constituted within the discourse. Finally, I conclude by suggesting that the traces of the discourse of democratic nationalism permeated not only the discourse of modernists, but also Islamists (will be discussed in Chapter 6).

### **Events**

In 1949, as Mohamad Reza Shah was consolidating his power, he began to lose the collective imagination of the people to an issue that symbolized the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) as all that was wrong with Iran. The issue was the once celebrated 1933 Oil Agreement between Iran and the AIOC.<sup>1</sup> Mohamad Reza Shah and his Anglophile deputies, who held a majority in the *Majlis* at the time, planned to rubber stamp the modification to the agreement, but their plan backfired and the issue changed from an ordinary trade issue into a national struggle for independence from foreign powers. In a matter of weeks, Mohamad Reza Shah’s supporters could not help but criticize the compensatory shortcomings of the proposal, while the opponents of the agreement began to question the legality of the 1933 agreement, calling it a violation of

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

Iran's sovereignty, "high treason" committed by signatories to the 1933 agreement, and freedom from foreign domination.<sup>2</sup> Simply put, a hegemonic discourse was constructed by symbolizing the AIOC as the manifestation of "foreignness" linked to domination intervention, occupation, weakness, backwardness, misery, and indignity of Self in a relational opposition to Britain.<sup>3</sup>

In this hegemony, supporting the Nationalization Bill proposed by National Front (NF) equated to nationalism, and opposing it meant being a foreigner or foreign agent (*Muzduran Khareji*).<sup>4</sup> Even the chief negotiator of the Supplementary Agreement, *Jahangir* Gulshahiyan, meekly asserted that he could have reached a better deal, had it not been for the pressure from above—the court.<sup>5</sup> As a result, a small coalition of deputies easily postponed the bill for the 16 *Majlis*.<sup>6</sup>

The control of 16 *Majlis* became the battle between two forces—the shah, Mussadiq, and their respective supporters. At the heart of the battle, however, were two different discourses for the nation-state—modern absolutism versus democratic nationalism. While modern absolutists relied on the state's coercive power supported by the United States, democratic nationalists relied on the power of the street.

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<sup>2</sup> Mohammad Musaddiq, *Musaddiq's Memoirs*, trans. Homa Katuzain (London: JEBHE, National Movement of Iran, 1988), V. ii, chapter 8. In fact Musaddiq's memoir is replete with the assertion that Anglophiles and Reza Shah conspired to extend the Darcy Concession for another 30 years, e.g., Musaddiq, *Musaddiq's Memoirs*, p. 312. Also see Katouzian, *Musaddiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran*, p. 67. According to Musaddiq's memoir, Dr. Hussein Fatemi first suggested that the nationalization of Iranian oil industry was a good strategy for Iranians because "it made it no longer necessary to prove the invalidity of the 1933 Agreement."

<sup>3</sup> By hegemonic identity, I mean that contending discourses were temporary unified by identifying with one sign. In this case, it was Iran against the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.

<sup>4</sup> National Front (NF) was a coalition made up of nationalists, Islamists, and the democratic socialists.

<sup>5</sup> See M. Fateh, *Panjah Saal Naft-E Iran/Fifty Years of Iranian Oil* (Tehran: Chehr Press, 1956/1335), pp. 385-411. Also see Elm, *Oil, Power, and Principle: Iran's Oil Nationalization and Its Aftermath*. Also see,

<sup>6</sup> See Ross, "Iran Parliament Faces Power Test; Packed by 1,000 Families, Its Attitude Will Determine If Dictatorship Is Set Up."

When the 16 *Majlis* began on February 10, 1950, *The New York Times*, reflecting the ongoing struggle between the two different political discourses, wrote: "Circumstances surrounding the session of the newly elected Parliament that opened yesterday indicate that this Parliament's attitude will decide whether Iran is to have a dictatorship."<sup>7</sup>

A few days before the shah's 1949 trip to the United States, Mussadiq protested, claiming election frauds, and led a large group of prominent national leaders to take sanctuary (*bast*) in the yard of one of the shah's palaces. Protesters demanded a free press, free elections, and the lifting of martial law. The shah was caught off guard by the boldness of Mussadiq's move at a time when the shah's demand for U.S. military aid was being debated.<sup>8</sup> He backed off and publicly promised to hold free elections.<sup>9</sup> When the 16 *Majlis* began in February 1950, the National Front did not have a majority, but it had the power of mobilizing the people.<sup>10</sup> With this move, there was a shift in the practices of both forces. Suddenly, Mohamad Reza Shah who had shown no respect for the constitution, began to invoke the supremacy of constitutional laws, legislative precedents, and legal procedures. Mussadiq, a lawyer and a professional bureaucrat, admonished the Shah for breaking precedent and began to invoke the people's rights and devalue laws that did not "serve the interests of the people."<sup>11</sup>

Public support for Mussadiq was extensive and deep. It was extensive because various associations of lawyers, engineers, *ulama*, *bazaaris*, and journalists supported him. Moreover, a

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<sup>7</sup> Waggoner, "Iran's Shah to Ask Assistance in U.S.; Monarch, Due on Wednesday, Expected to Express Need for Military, Economic, Aid."

<sup>8</sup> Ross, "Iran Parliament Faces Power Test; Packed by 1,000 Families,' Its Attitude Will Determine If Dictatorship Is Set Up." Also see Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 252.

<sup>9</sup> Makki, *Tarikhech eh Jebhaya Melli (a Short History of the National Front)*.

<sup>10</sup> For more information on the National Front and its core members, see Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

large majority of the people simply identified with Mussadiq. His support was deep because political parties, such as Iran's Party, the Party of Toilers of Iran, the Tudeh Party, the Party of Democrats affiliated with Qavam, the Society of Muslim Warriors (*Jamaya Mojahedian Islami*), and the Devotees of Islam (*Fadaian-i Islam*) supported him.<sup>12</sup>

Sensing the popularity of Mussadiq's movement, Mohamad Reza Shah needed a strongman to settle the oil issue and appointed General Ali Razmara to be the prime minister. This choice backfired; Razmara tried to make a coalition of the pro-Soviet Union Tudeh Party and Sayed Zia's pro-British party. Razmara's coalition began not only to scare the Shah, but also Islamists in the NF, who were not against the Shah at the time but against Razmara whom Islamists perceived as a British stooge. Ayatollah "Kashani encouraged all 'sincere' Muslims and patriotic citizens to fight against the enemies of Islam and Iran by joining the nationalization struggle. Finally, the Fadaian-i Islam authorized one of its members . . . the 'scared mission' of assassinating that 'British stooge,' Razmara."<sup>13</sup>

The public rejoicing over Razmara's death left no doubt as to the intensity of the hatred for anyone represented as an "Anglophile." The shah appointed Hussein Ala as prime minister. However, Ala's government fell in less than two months when the Tudeh Party's organized strike in the AIOC refinery in Abadan was turning into a revolution that drew British gunboats to the Persian Gulf. The strike also alerted the shah of the strength of the Tudeh organizational power. It became obvious that the National Front and Tudeh Party overwhelmingly controlled the popular imagination, and each was infiltrating the military, the police, and the state

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<sup>12</sup> Katouzian, *Musaddiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran*, pp. 71-77. Also see Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 254-255. For a list of members, see Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 266. People such as Mussadiq, Kashani, Maki, Haari-zadih, Bagai, Sanjabi, Shaiygan, and Fatemi were among some of the most effective orators.

<sup>13</sup> Elm, *Oil, Power, and Principle: Iran's Oil Nationalization and Its Aftermath*, ch.5.

bureaucracy. To avert a social revolution, the shah and the *Majlis* sided with the nationalists and agreed to Mussadiq's nine-point plan for nationalization of the oil industry as a precondition for him to form a new government.<sup>14</sup>

Relying on his public support, Mussadiq nationalized the AIOC. Britain reacted with fury not only at the loss of its most valued prize, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, but because of the blow to its Middle Eastern imperial prestige and possessions. Anthony Eden, the British prime minister, called for confronting Iran for the return "of stolen property" and prevention of the "spread of Mussaddiqism in the Arab Middle East."<sup>15</sup> As Britain's effort to defeat Mussadiq intensified, so did Mussadiq's popularity<sup>16</sup>

On July 16, 1952, Mussadiq ratcheted up the pressure. In effect, he told the shah that either he must give up his post as the military commander-in-chief or Mussadiq would turn in his resignation. Considering the immense popularity of Mussadiq at the time, that meant a possible revolution.<sup>17</sup> The shah initially refused and nominated Qavam as the prime minister whom the British favored to form a new government.<sup>18</sup> On July 21, 1952 (*Siya Tir*), the revolutionary uprising, which was organized by nationalists led by Mussadiq, Islamists led by Kashani, and socialists led by the Tudeh, began to mutiny in the military. The generals ordered soldiers back to their barracks, and protestors began to control the streets. By 5 p.m., news of the victory of

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<sup>14</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, pp. 261-266. Also, Katouzian, *Musaddiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran*, pp. 117.

<sup>15</sup> Katouzian, *Musaddiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran*, p. 122.

<sup>16</sup> Britain first referred Iran to the International Court of Justice in The Hague and later to the National Security Council, but it lost its cases. Britain also began to use its various embassies throughout Iran as the basis for fomenting opposition, but Mussadiq closed all of them. Then the British economic blockade worsened the economic conditions of Iran, but it was not enough to bring down Mussadiq's government. Finally, Britain resorted to military means by lobbying for a military coup. See Katouzian, *Musaddiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran*, 122-25

<sup>17</sup> It appears that Mussadiq was content to retire. In his memoir, he alludes to his fatalistic desire to go back to retirement. Also see Mohammad Mussadiq, "Public Letter of Resignation," *Ittial'lat*, July 17, 1952.

<sup>18</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 270.



Mussadiq's supporters was triumphantly broadcasted from the state radio.<sup>19</sup> From that point, *Siya Tir* (July 21) entered into the language as a mythical day when people defeated the state.<sup>20</sup> The day after the uprising, Mussadiq effectively used his unmatched popularity to form his second government with the promise of freedom for the people and independence from foreigners.

Once Mussadiq's control of the state was complete, the coalition of the contending discourses that had helped him take over the government began to collapse. First, Britain was represented as a defeated power. Hence, what had unified people with contending discourses in their opposition to Britain disappeared. In a number of speeches, Mussadiq attempted to refocus the attention of his opponents back to the British question, but he was not able to do so as Ayatollah Khomeini successfully would do some 37 years later by allowing Americans to be held as hostages.<sup>21</sup> In a total reversal of position, Islamists broke away from Mussadiq and represented him as the enemy of Islam.<sup>22</sup> Constitutionalists represented him as a dictator who was in violation of the sacred constitution.<sup>23</sup> Ironically, Mohamad Reza Shah and modernists

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<sup>19</sup> The account of how many people were killed or seriously injured ranges from 29 to 750. Abrahamian suggests that 250 were either killed or seriously injured See Ha'er-zadeh, "Parliamentary Proceedings, 17<sup>th</sup> Majlis " (May 19, 1953).

<sup>20</sup> The headline in *Ettela'at*, July 22, 1952

<sup>21</sup> After the 1979 revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini appeared to have understood that he needed to maintain America as the symbol of unity.

<sup>22</sup> Haerizadeh, a prominent member of the *Majles*, stated: "Mussadiq was out to destroy our country with class conflicts." See, Fateh, *Panjah Saal Naft-E Iran/Fifty Years of Iranian Oil*

<sup>23</sup> The right wing of the National Front was comprised of well-known individuals such as Ayatollah Kashani, by then a member of the Majlis; Bager Kazemi a respected non-clerical Muslim devotee; Mehdi Bazargan, a new breed of highly educated Muslim devotees, the head of the Islamic Society. For reversal of the National Front fortune, see Mohammed Reza, *Mission for My Country*, Mohammed Reza, *Answer to History*.

represented Mussadiq as a British agent and an anti monarchist.<sup>24</sup> Finally, the Tudeh represented him as an American stooge trying to serve the interest of U.S. imperialism rather than Britain.<sup>25</sup>

However, despite the collapse of the hegemonic coalition build by Mussadiq and counterpoised to Britain, Mussadiq's popular support surpassed the support of all other contending discourses combined. Up to the day of his fall from power, Mussadiq maintained the support of some of the most respected public intellectuals, journalists, lawyers, politicians, *ulama*, younger generation of military officers, and clearly the majority of the press.<sup>26</sup> However, external events once again sealed whatever fate Iran's democratization might have had. After the 1953 CIA-backed coup succeeded and Mussadiq's government fell, the discourse of modern monarchism became the official state discourse for the next 27 years. I will discuss the construction and collapse of that discourse in Chapter 6.

### **Political Identity of Democratic Nationalism (1951-1953)**

By signifying "people," the discourse of democratic nationalism constituted the meanings of order and security, development and modernization, law and civilization, Islam and ethics,

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<sup>24</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 321.

<sup>25</sup> The Tudeh perceived Mussadiq in two ways. The old generation of Tudeh represented and understood Mussadiq as the representative of the national bourgeois in a progressive struggle against the shah's feudalism and British imperialism. The younger and more radical wing of the Tudeh, closely following the Soviet line, represented Mussadiq as the representative of the *comprador bourgeois* linked to American imperialism. The pages of *Be-su-ya Ayandih (Toward the Future)*, which officially reflected the views of the Tudeh Party Central Committee, is full of texts representing these two approaches. This ambiguity in the Tudeh's position toward the National Front resulted in a fatal blow not only to the discourse of democratic-nationalism in Iran, but also to the Tudeh that bore the brunt of the Shah's repression after the CIA coup of 1953. In short, the Tudeh primarily identified with the class-analysis, and thus its support for Mussadiq was contingent upon how it interpreted the state of capitalism in Iran. However, as the Mussadiq's grip on the control of the state became stronger after the event of July 21, the Tudeh became more oppositional toward Mussadiq because it was gaining more confidence that after Mussadiq's fall, it could easily take over the states. The Tudeh Party had proven that it had the ability to mobilize more than 300,000 people. See "Mussadegh, the Politics of Oil, and American Foreign Policy" (Upper Montclair, New Jersey, Oct. 30, 1992). For a review of why the Tudeh did not mobilize, see the General Discussion of a conference held by some of the most well-known Iranian experts, "Protest in Baharestan Circle," *Ettelaat* August 17, 1953.

<sup>26</sup> The morning after the initial coup, which appeared to have failed, thousands of people gathered in Bahrestan to protest the coup. People brought down many of Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah statues. See Said Fatemi, "To End the Pain of Hunger, a Man Hunged Himself," *Bakhtar Emrouz* June 1949.

and class and justice. Through a particular signification of “people,” democratic nationalists imagined an ideal nation-state in which the “people” were represented as a unified body with no distinction made between Persians and non-Persians, capitalists and workers, civilized citizens and savages, Muslims and non-Muslims, and modern and traditional. In other words, the “people” became the basic signifier that linked a series of images, words, and practices to construct a political space in which differences in Self disappeared to constitute a unified body called the “people” conceptualized as the absolute sovereign; therefore, the provider and the beneficiary of order or security, law, development, justice, and ethics.

However, transforming the fragmented body of the nation into a unified Self needed a historically available and socially understood sign or symbol in the language. That sign was *Kharejian* (foreigners), which was already related to how Iranians imagined themselves in relation to others. Since the 1906 Constitutional Revolution, the word “foreigner” (*Kharejian*) had signified weakness, poverty, misery, insecurity, and domination of Self by arrogance, power, and wealth over others. Yet *Kharijian* had exited into the language in many forms. To transform this heterogeneity into homogeneity needed another available, possible, and imaginable sign in the language. That sign was the AIOC, which linked Britain. Foreigners reflected all that was imagined wrong with Iran—no independence, no freedom, no law, underdevelopment, class injustice, and unethical practices. In effect, this discourse represented Iran as a collective body threatened by the AIOC and Britain. In the discourse on democratic nationalism, Iran was represented as a biological body whose very survival was threatened by Britain. Through this practices, the people were motivated and mobilized as though they were a singular body threatened by Britain. In the next section, I will discuss how rhetoric, policies, and practices in the discourse constructed a political space in which people were turned into the absolute

sovereign and thus the legitimate provider of security, development, law, democracy, equality, and social ethics.

### **Imagining the Nation**

#### **Motivating, Unifying, and Mobilizing the People**

Representing people as the absolute sovereign discursively constructed a singular body of a nation in opposition to foreign powers and their Iranian agents. The binary representation of “people” opposing “foreigners” translated into the struggle for people’s motivation and mobilization. Articulating this representation were individuals such as Khalil Maleki, Ali Shayigan, Ahmad Razavi, Jalal Naini, Rahmat Mustafavi, and Hussein Fatemi. The latter three men edited a daily paper titled *Bakhtar-i Emruz (Today’s East)*, which became the official organ of the National Front. However, as the NF fragmented, the paper remained a loyal promoter of Mussadiq’s discourse of democratic nationalism until the fall of his government. By representing the “people” as a unified body in a life-and-death struggle, *Bakhtar-i Emruz* motivated the people to take the state away from foreign usurpers of power and establish the people’s sovereignty (*hukumat-i mardumi*). For example, in its first issue in 1949, the headline read, “To End the Pain of Hunger, a Man Hung Himself.”<sup>27</sup> The piece is not, however, about the plight of a man; it is about the body of the nation that is dying because of corrupt and incompetent state-elites who pursued their own self-interest and the interests of foreigners (*Kharejian*), but ignored the horrible socio-political conditions of the nation. The paper stated that if the elites were of the people, the suffering would end. The paper therefore argued that the only solution for ending the suffering was for the people to establish the people’s sovereignty, free from the contamination of

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<sup>27</sup> "Commemorating Imam Hussein's Birthday," *Bakhtar Emruz* May, 9 1950.

*Kharejian* and their Iranian agents. In other words, the paper represented a man as a dying embodiment of a nation that had to establish its own people's sovereignty.

This was done by representing people's sovereignty as a natural fact of history embedded in both Persian and Islamic myths. For example, for the occasion of commemorating Imam Hussein's birthday, Bakhtar-i Emruz compared the present with the past by suggesting, despite all odds, that Imam Hussein struggled against the unjust rulers and thus created an epic example of valor for resisting unjust rule and promoting freedom and justice for people. The text represented Imam Hussein as a contemporary nationalist in a struggle to build a state free from foreign domination and/or intervention.<sup>28</sup> In other words, signifying the people as the absolute sovereign not only motivated and mobilized people, but also drew upon the meaning of Islamic and Persian myths. Signifying the "people" as the source of governing was how Mussadiq's government came to power and maintained it for 27 months.

For example, a year after Mussadiq's government had been in power, he decided to place the military and police under civilian rule. The shah refused to give up his most prized authority, and the matter was settled in the street. On the anniversary of the uprising in July 21, 1952 (*Si-ya Tir*), Bakhtar-i Emruz described the ideals of democratic nationalism in which people are represented as a unified body resurrected in a great Jihad to achieve the people's sovereignty and thus freedom, independence, law, development, justice, and ethics.<sup>29</sup>

The text argued: "In that historical day . . . with words and blood . . . we call for freedom . . . and understood that freedom is not a gift."<sup>30</sup> This representation utilizes Islamic myths to

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<sup>28</sup> ———, "Si-Ya Tir, the Day of National Resurrection," *Bakhtar Emruz*, Monday, July 20, 1953/1332.

<sup>29</sup> As a reminder, *Si-ya Tir* is the day of the showdown between Mussadiq's government and the shah's appointed, Qavam's government. Mussadiq won this battle.

<sup>30</sup> Fatemi, "Si-Ya Tir, the Day of National Resurrection."

invoke the Marxist language of historical struggle, not against class enemies, but against Kharejian and their historically determined fates. The text then represented the “people” as the legitimate source of laws. It stated:

We have waited to see a constitutional government; now, we will build one by ourselves. We will . . . first level your palaces and then construct our nation on their rubbles. We will free ourselves from . . . centuries of misery and slavery, and we will build a government of the people, by the people. We will break all idols and idolatries, and we will demand our rights and freedom.<sup>31</sup>

The text also represented the “people” as the legitimate interpreter of the law: “The government uselessly invoked the constitution, rules, procedures, and laws; all that it had already been corrupted.”<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the text represented the “people” as a historically united body:

We the people . . . shared a divine unity . . . [inherited] from our forefathers whose voices came from within us, we want to destroy this shameful despotism and restore the spirit of our constitution, we want freedom for our people . . . and fighting us is as if you are fighting the words of God.”<sup>33</sup>

While the people were represented as a singular body with a common history, faith, blood, will, and leadership, their religious, tribal, class, and historical differences were muted.

Moreover, the people’s enemy was also represented as a historical entity their fathers had fought but had not won yet. The text argued that “we Iranians had not yet cut the hands of foreigners and the backstabbing traitors, and by relying on the infinite power of the people led by our ‘beloved’ leader, Mussadiq, we will soon establish our sovereignty fully.”<sup>34</sup>

Discursively, in the historical and religious struggle between the people and their foreign enemies, the very life of the nation is threatened by internal and external enemies. Moreover, the

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Jamal Emami, "Parliamentary Proceedings," (1951), 16th Majles, Nov. 13.

people were represented as the absolute sovereign and thus the source of security, development, law, equality, and Islamic ethics. As such, Mussadiq always threatened to go to the people, and his opponents used to deride him for using “street politics.”<sup>35</sup> In a fiery speech to the *Majlis* (Parliament), Jamal Emami protested, “Statecraft has degenerated into street politics. It appears that this country has nothing better to do than hold street meetings.”<sup>36</sup> According to Emami:

Is our premier a statesman or a mob leader? What type of premier says, “I will speak to the people” every time he is faced with a political question? I always considered this man to be unsuitable for high office. But I never imagined, even in my worst nightmare, that an old man of seventy would turn into a rabble-rouser. A man who constantly surrounds the *Majlis* with thugs is nothing less than a public menace.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, for democratic nationalists, motivating, unifying, and mobilizing people created a political space in which imagining people as the absolute sovereign was conceivable, and that conceivability permeated the meaning of how law, development, social or class justice, and Islamic and Persian ethics were interpreted. Moreover, for democratic nationalists, what remained constant before and after Mussadiq’s takeover of the government was how the nation saw itself in terms of its historical struggle against foreigners embodied in Britain.

### **Imagining People as the Source of Law**

As discussed in the previous chapters, “law” has been one of the basic signifiers in the shaping of Iranian contending discourses identities. Since the 1906 Constitutional Revolution, law, constitution, civilization, and the West had been discursively constructed in their relational differences to despotism, lawlessness, and absolutism in the East in general and Iran in particular. These relational linkages and differences remained in the language practices of

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<sup>35</sup> Ettelaat, June 20, 1951.

<sup>36</sup> See Fateh, *Panjah Saal Naft-E Iran/Fifty Years of Iranian Oil* p. 580.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 267-268. Translation in, Said Fatemi, “Either Freedom or Death (*Ya Marg, Ya Azadi*)” *Bakhtar*, August 18, 1949.

democratic nationalists. They shaped how the “West” was signified as being lawful, civilized, and industrialized democracies where freedom, justice, and ethics flourished. This representation was constructed in opposition to the East. Said Fatemi, one the founder of *Bakhtar*, wrote :

In the West, the level of civilization and development of a country is measured . . . in terms of a political environment in which freedom, justice, and good governance flourish. In the East, after many generations of struggle to achieve “freedom” and “justice,” we do not yet understand the meanings of these concepts. We cannot even contemplate that there is another world out there [the West], where people do not suffer from despotic tyranny, invasion, force, and despotism. . . . But out beyond our grassless, waterless, and desolate deserts, there is a world called the West. A world where people do not fear from government-owned bayonets; where people do not adulate their leaders by force or for the sake of their survival; and where elites do not betray their own people to succeed in politics. However, under this colonial rule we call the East, people cannot decide for themselves, people are not sovereign, and people live as animals do in the state of nature—the state of nature where only the fittest and strongest survive.<sup>38</sup>

In this representation, the East-West is categorized as the civilized West in opposition to the state of nature in the colonized East. The text then makes a clear differentiation between the West and foreigners. In other words, the West is not a concrete geographic location or homogenous concept. Instead, the West is dichotomized: the West where people are sovereign and states are lawful, civilized, industrialized, and democratic, and the West where foreigners, colonizers, and despots and their supporters originate.<sup>39</sup>

In this country, leaders sell their beliefs for pennies; legislatures pride themselves for their association with foreign embassies, but feel humiliated to stand up for the interest of the people. While the government suffocates patriotic writers and citizens, it rewards sycophants and traitors.<sup>40</sup>

In short, the signifier for democratic nationalists was the people in opposition to Western foreigners, colonizers, despots, and corrupt leaders, all of whom the discourse labeled as

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<sup>38</sup> Fatemi, "Either Freedom or Death (*Ya Marg, Ya Azadi*)."

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. *Bakhtar* is another name for various versions of *Bakhtar Emruz*, which was repeatedly suspended by the government, and it was republished under different versions of the same name.

<sup>40</sup> Musaddiq, *Musaddiq's Memoirs*, p. 354.



*Kharejian* (foreigners). However, *Kharejian* were not yet equated to the West as a whole. Instead, the West was glorified as the place where people were sovereign, and the West where foreigners came from.

### **Discourse of Developing the State**

#### **Freedom, Independence**

In this interpretation, the relational opposition between *Irani* and *Khareji* shaped how freedom and independence were represented, understood, and practiced. For democratic nationalists, people's freedom meant independence from foreign powers in economics, politics, and foreign relations. Mussadiq wrote: "For me and men like me, a foreigner is a foreigner whatever his aims and ideology. What can anyone do when every clique of foreign agents seeks the dominance of its own master, and the destruction of men like me in this country?"<sup>41</sup> In this rhetorical practice, nationalism and nationalizing are equated to independence from foreign powers. This articulatory practice was conceived as "good" because it linked the people's sovereignty to nationalizing the AIOC: (a) pursuing economic autarky, (b) subordinating the military to civilian rules, (c) forcing the shah to reign rather than rule, (d) constructing history accordingly, and (e) following a policy of non-alignment.

#### **Political Development**

Representing the people as the absolute sovereign meant constructing relational linkages between "people" as being the legitimate source of constructing a political order and establishing security. Representing the "people" as the provider of security and development was in sharp contrast to how modern absolutists represented political development, which was embodied in the shah. When Mohamad Reza Shah formed the Senate, Mussadiq declared it as illegal and

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<sup>41</sup> Mohammad Mussadiq, *Speeches by Dr. Mussadiq* 2vols. (Tehran: Bee Jaa, 1979/1348), v. 2, p. 14.

illegitimate because it did not represent the people. In all these arguments, Mussadiq represented “people” as the legitimate source of laws. To devalue criticism that Mussadiq was not following the law, he would occasionally argue that “the constitution was for the nation, not the nation for the constitution.”<sup>42</sup> In contrast, he would criticize his opponents for not paying attention to public opinion.<sup>43</sup>

Mussadiq argued that if Mohamad Reza Shah ruled as an English monarch does instead of an absolutist despot, his father’s fate would not be awaiting him—dying in exile alienated from his people and without the support of his foreign allies.<sup>44</sup> He often said: “The king of England is highly respected because he stands outside politics and avoids the dirty business of appointing and dismissing ministries, deputies, and governors.”<sup>45</sup> Classifying “people” as the absolute sovereign created the possibility of reclassifying the shah as a historical institution and not the embodiment of the state as modern absolutists depicted him.

For example, on the ninth anniversary of Mohamad Reza Shah’s rule, the editorial column of *Bakhtar-i Emruz* referred to the shah as “the young, kind, and democratic shah of Iran.” Referring to the Soviet occupation, the paper admired the patriotic role the shah had played in returning Azerbaijan and Kurdistan back to the fatherland. The piece argued that the shah’s Western education was a positive attribute that gave him the necessary insight to care about the deplorable conditions of Iranians and compassion for his people. The piece stated: “Without any doubt whatsoever, if all those who are responsible for the affair of this country cared to perform their national duties as consciously as the shah did, then, these gloomy conditions would cease to

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>43</sup> For example, his rhetoric against Razmara, see Musaddiq, *Musaddiq's Memoirs*.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> “The Ninth Anniversary of His Reign,” *Bakhtar Emruz*, Sep. 5, 1949.

exist.”<sup>46</sup> In other words, the text differentiated the shah from the corrupt state-elites. This representation of the shah continued until the 1953 coup became apparent. From then on, the shah was never again represented as democratic, progressive, or a part of the people. In fact, for all the contending discourses, the shah became the symbol of foreign domination and intervention.

Following this logic, in 1952 Mussadiq formally requested the subordination of the military to the civilian rule, which would effectively force the shah to reign rather than rule. On the other hand, the shah viewed himself as the absolute sovereign and saw the military as his personal inheritance, the relinquishment of which would mean the fall of the state, so he refused to give up his post. Mussadiq resigned, but his resignation set off the event of *Si-ya Tir*, which could have blown into a full-scale revolution. Thus, the shah was forced to give up his role as the commander in chief of the military and police.

Additionally, Mussadiq legally barred the shah from negotiating with foreign diplomats without the knowledge of the *Majlis* or the presence of a cabinet member at all meetings. Nevertheless, the United States and Britain maintained their direct contact with the shah, the military, and some of the deputies in the *Majlis*. Since democratic nationalists perceived people as the sovereign, the perceived freedom, independence, and development in a relational opposition to foreigners was embodied in Britain and, to a lesser extent, the Soviet Union.

In effect, during this era, two governments existed, each with a different vision of independence from foreigners and thus political order and development. Modern absolutists viewed the shah as the sovereign. They therefore saw Mussadiq as the embodiment of anti-

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<sup>46</sup> Mussadiq, *Speeches by Dr. Mussadiq* p. 22.

Iranian monarchic nationalism and the corresponding ways of perceiving economic and political development.<sup>47</sup>

### **Economic Development**

The key to economic development for democratic nationalists was its independence from foreign powers. In contrast to modern absolutism supporters, who wanted rapid, large-scale, and state-led growth in alliance with a supportive great power, democratic nationalists wanted a gradual, middle-sized, and locally-based developmental program. Interestingly, Mussadiq's economic plan was very similar to the British economic plan at the time, and it did not deviate from the economic principles of the Plan Organization proposed by the United States. However, neither one of these powers saw Mussadiq's economic plans for its objectives, which was to promote domestic economic growth by small and mid-size industries, diversification, and uprooting "the old and corrupted forces in operation in Iran," as the American consulting firm, the Overseas Consultants Inc. (OCI) had advised. Thus, the intransigencies on behalf of Britain and Iran were less about the substantive content of economic policies than the articulatory practices of them.

On one hand, Britain refused to accept Iran's rights to nationalize properties even though Iran had agreed to pay a fair market value for the AIOC. Fakhreddin Azimi contends:

Refusing to believe that the movement for the nationalization of the oil industry was anything more than spurious, the British dismissed Mussadeh as a "Lunatic," impervious to reason, unable or ill-equipped to identify, understand or safeguard the interests of his country. Perceiving their privileged position to be beneficial to Iran, if not part of the natural order of things, they were determined to save Iran from itself, and purportedly from communism, by whatever means necessary.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Fakhreddin Azimi, "Mussadeh, Iranian Nationalism and Oil " (paper presented at the Mussadeh, the Politics of Oil, and American Foreign Policy Oct 30, 1992), pp. 24-25.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

On the other hand, Mussadiq perceived anything less than the explicit recognition of the nationalization of oil industry “as a defeat of national aspiration and concomitantly the undermining of democratic objectives.”<sup>49</sup> Alternatively, the World Bank’s formula for settling the dispute between Iran and Britain could have been acceptable, had it explicitly recognized Iran’s sovereign rights as the International Court of Justice in The Hague had done.<sup>50</sup> The oil nationalization issue was about identity issues rather than objective and disinterested economic issues for Iranians. According to Hussein Maki, before Baghai became an ardent enemy of Mussadiq, he had declared that “Iran’s oil resources should be destroyed by an atom bomb rather than remain in the AIOC’s hands.”<sup>51</sup> In other words, the understanding of economic development was not based on some objective economic criteria independent of the politics of identity, which linked nationalization to Iran’s independence. As such, nationalization was represented as the only way to cure Iran’s underdevelopment. Mussadiq would occasionally reiterate, “There would be no way to assure Iran’s freedom and independence unless all of its oil industry is nationalized.”<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, the legal term that the government used to describe the oil nationalization policy was *Khal-i Yad*, which literally means hands off. This term invoked the oppositional relation between a property owner and a thief. Conversely, Britain branded Iranian oil sold to third parties during the dispute as “stolen property.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Musaddiq, *Musaddiq's Memoirs*, PP. 334-354.

<sup>50</sup> For information on how Mussadiq felt about this issue, see, Katouzian, *Musaddiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran*, p. 137.

<sup>51</sup> Mussadiq, *Speeches by Dr. Mussadiq* v. 1, p. 109.

<sup>52</sup> Katouzian, *Musaddiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran*, pp. 122-125.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

In other words, both economic and political development were represented, understood, and practiced in terms of independence from foreign powers.<sup>54</sup> That is why even negotiation with foreign powers appeared suspicious, unpatriotic, and conspiratorial. Conversely, economic independence, self-sufficiency, and self-reliance appeared patriotic and good. This articulatory practice justified the nationalization of the AIOC and the non-renewal of the Soviet Union fishing concession in the Caspian Sea. It also justified other economic policies pushed by Mussadiq's government. Mussadiq argued that if Iran denied the nationalization of the AIOC, other countries, which implied the Soviet Union, would not have an excuse to demand favorable concessions.<sup>55</sup>

Mussadiq's government encouraged domestic economic growth by reforming civil, criminal, press, administrative, tax, and labor laws, and by reducing the military budget concomitant with increasing export and decreasing import.<sup>56</sup> Pursuing these policies under economic sanctions was challenging, but Mussadiq's government was gradually overcoming them.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, marketing oil directly to buyers was beginning to diminish the effectiveness of Britain's naval blockade and the U.S. refusal to buy Iranian oil. It appeared that the government was on its way to recovering from the initial shock of the oil nationalization project.

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<sup>54</sup> Katouzian also made this argument, that is, establishing a sovereign state was more important to Mussadiq than immediate economic development; see, Mussadiq, *Speeches by Dr. Mussadiq* p.116.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>56</sup> James Bill and Roger Louis, eds., *Mussaddiq, Iranian Nationalization and Oil* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), p. 223.

<sup>57</sup> "Carrying Iranian Oil to Japan Is a Great New Loss for England.," *Ettelaat* April 14, 1953.

For example, news of Japanese and Italian oil tankers arriving, loading, and leaving Abadan was enthusiastically reported as if Iran had already defeated Britain.<sup>58</sup> In a sense, the government began to treat the oil issue as if it had already won the battle, and all indications pointed that way. According to Katouzian, “On purely economic grounds, the fall of Mussadiq’s government was by no means inevitable.”<sup>59</sup>

In short, the discourse of democratic nationalism constructed a political space that made a particular representation, description, and rationalization of economic development as the only way to assure Iran’s aspiration for freedom, independence, and development. All other alternatives or possibilities were represented as bad, foreign-driven, and detrimental to Iran’s survival. Even history was reconstructed to prove the point. Mussadiq argued: “I was opposed to oil concession . . . ever since the 9 *Majlis* when the 1933 Agreement was concluded . . . [and] I was certain that, as long as foreign powers operated Iran’s oil resources, this country would never see the face of freedom . . . independence . . . and development.”<sup>60</sup>

### **Foreign Relations**

Democratic nationalists imagined the nation as a singular body united in a historical struggle against *Kharejian*. This dichotomization of Iran versus foreigners permeated into the conduct of foreign policy. Patriotism meant standing up to *Kharejian* and betrayal meant supporting foreigners. For example, in his memoir, to prove that he has always been a patriot, Mussadiq wrote:

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<sup>58</sup> For example, a front page title read, *Carrying Iranian Oil to Japan Is a Great New Loss for England*. In a celebratory tone, another title on the same day read, *Loading the Twenty-Thousand-Ton Japanese Tanker Finished and It Left Abadan Today; Tomorrow Loading the Five-Thousand-Ton Italian Tanker Begins*. See Bill and Louis, eds., *Mussaddiq, Iranian Nationalization and Oil*, p. 225.

<sup>59</sup> Mussadiq, *Speeches by Dr. Mussadiq*

<sup>60</sup> Musaddiq, *Musaddiq's Memoirs*, pp. 280-281.

It bears witness to the fact that, in the entire period of my premiership, I had no insidious dealings with any foreign power which plays an important rule in Iranian politics, be it England or the Soviet Union. It shows that I have put the interest of my country above everything else, including my own life, and all my words and deeds have been in the service of the Iranian people. It also provides that the blow against me was due to the plans drawn up by foreign powers, and executed on the orders of some of my fellow countrymen [that is, the shah].<sup>61</sup>

The text counterpoised Iran and foreign interests. The formation of this particular construct translated into the foreign policy of what democratic nationalists called “negative equilibrium” (*Muvazeneh-Manfi*) as opposed to “positive equilibrium” (*Muvazeneh-Musbat*), which had been the dominant discourse in Iranian foreign policy for decades.

The phrase *Muvazeneh-Mosbat* (positive equilibrium) is revealing. It is the Farsi translation of the term “balance of power,” which had essentially entered political texts from the West. In the context of Iranian politics, positive equilibrium meant playing the interest of the Soviets or Russia against Britain by auctioning off major concessions to one or the other party. This policy had grave economic and political costs for Iran that, as a weak power, was always a loser whether the two powers competed or cooperated. During the competition between the powers, each power negotiated various deals with Iran to reinforce its own position in relation to the power of its competitor, which always weakened Iran’s position. During cooperation between the two powers, both negotiated with one another as how to divide Iran without even bothering to negotiate with Iran, for example, the 1907 Agreement between Britain and Russia.

However, the concept of negative equilibrium was not a Western concept. Jawaharlal Nehru first articulated the concept of non-alignment in 1947, which essentially rejected the East-West or the communist-capitalist bifurcation, and encouraged the policy of non-alignment, which called for independence from domination, intervention, and rivalry of great powers.

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<sup>61</sup> Hussein Kay Ustovan, *Siyasat-I Muvazaneh-I Manfi Dar Majlis Chardahum (the Politics of Negative-Equilibrium in the 14<sup>th</sup> Majlis* (Tehran: Muzafar, 1950), v. 1, p. 193.



Nehru's doctrine of non-alignment had great intellectual traction in Iran. In fact, it coincided with the split in the generally pro-Soviet position of the Tudeh Party and the eventual rise of the Third Force, which became the intellectual engine for representing the ideals of the discourse of democratic nationalism. Members of the Third Force were among the most loyal supporters of Mussadiq.<sup>62</sup> In other words, negative equilibrium entered the texts as the opposite of positive equilibrium—a concept that already existed and was perceived as a failure in dealing with British and Soviet-Russia.

Despite these distinctions, however, the two concepts were not exactly antonyms. Negative equilibrium had much broader political, economic, and foreign policy implications. It meant independence from foreign powers, and the concept entered the language as an opposite of positive equilibrium, which signified the opposition to the dominant discourse of foreign policy in Iran. Mussadiq articulated negative equilibrium in terms of independence from foreign powers manifested in his attitude toward Britain and the Soviet Union. In the 14<sup>th</sup> *Majlis*, he argued:

Those who insist on pursuing the policy of positive equilibrium in effect argue that we must also give up the rights to our northern oil fields for the next ninety-two years [referring to the British 1933 Agreement] in order to make a positive balance. This flawed logic is similar to the logic of asking a man, who has lost one of his arms, to cut his other arm for the sake balancing his body.<sup>63</sup>

The understanding of negative equilibrium would have been impossible without counterpoising it against positive equilibrium, which was inevitably linked to the role of Britain and Soviet-Russia in Iran, though it was not linked to the role of the United States. In other words, although the doctrine of negative-equilibrium was supposed to apply to all foreign powers, it actually

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<sup>62</sup> The discourse of the Third Force, especially the position of neither East nor West, eventually permeated the language of all opposition against the shah and his acquiescent alliance with the West, which included both the Soviet and the United States.

<sup>63</sup> George C. McGhee, "Recollection of Dr. Muhammad Mussadiq," in *Mussadiq Iranian Nationalization and Oil* ed. James A Bill and WM. Roger Louis (Austin: University of Texas, 1988).

applied to Britain and the Soviet Union, but not the United States. In fact, Mussadiq wanted to engage the United States in Iran, and he never criticized the increasing role of United States in the military, the Plan Organization, and the court. The United States was not identified a foreign power until the post-coup era.

**Relations with the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union:** During this era, 1951-1953, the United States was not considered an insidious foreign power. In fact, it was represented as a democratic and friendly state. Mussadiq's trust in the United States was reflected in his belief that the United States (a) would understand Iran's position against the AIOC, (b) would not stop buying Iranian oil, (c) would not block Iran's request for a loan from the World Bank, and (d) would facilitate private investment in Iran's oil industries.

Mussadiq relied upon the knowledge that the United States was, in fact, a democratic and friendly state. In Mussadiq's visit to the United States in 1952, his letter to President Harry Truman, and his appeal to the American people, he tried to convince America of the democratic characteristics of his government. For Mussadiq, it was inconceivable that the United States would throw in its lot with Britain against the democratically elected government in Iran. In fact, when Mussadiq received an invitation from President Truman, it gave him the false impression that Truman would sympathize with Iran's position.<sup>64</sup> According to George McGhee, Mussadiq understood the United States as a friendly state and could not conceive of the possibility that the United States would take the side of the shah and Britain to the detriment of his government. McGhee argued that Mussadiq was confident that the United States took the threat of

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp. 302-304.

communism seriously enough not to allow his government to fall.<sup>65</sup> Even during the CIA coup, the United States was not identified as an enemy state.

For example, on the afternoon of August 16, 1953, when it appeared that the coup had failed and the shah had escaped to Italy, people began to converge in front of the *Majlis*. By 3 p.m., in the burning heat of August in Tehran, thousands of people were shouting “death to the coup makers,” “long live the nation,” and “hang the coup makers.” Addressing the crowd were some of the most prominent state officials such as Hussein Fatemi, Jalali, Shaygan, and Razavi. In their addresses, no one mentioned the United States or its role.<sup>66</sup> It was not yet conceivable that the United States would overthrow or seriously oppose Mussadiq’s government.

At the time, the dominant discourse was that Mussadiq’s government benefited the United States. This discourse was not only prominent among nationalists but also among socialists, although in two hierarchic formations. Democratic nationalists perceived Mussadiq’s government as a democratic alternative against the pro-Soviet Tudeh party and, therefore, a natural ally of Western democracies led by U.S. socialists. On the other hand, the democratic nationalists portrayed Mussadiq as a liberal democrat standing against the cause of international communism. They accused Mussadiq of paving the way for the United States to replace Britain. For example, on July 14, 1952, when President Truman sent Averell Harriman to mediate Iran’s dispute with the AIOC, the Tudeh party represented the trip “as proof of a complete sell-out to the United States,” and it organized one of the largest and bloodiest demonstrations aimed at discrediting the government.<sup>67</sup> Although from two different points of view, both nationalists and socialists perceived Mussadiq as a natural ally of the United States.

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<sup>65</sup> "Protest in Baharestan Circle," pp. 1-4.

<sup>66</sup> Katouzian, *Musaddiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran*, p. 116.

<sup>67</sup> Mohammad Mussadiq, "The Prime Minister Raido Message to the Nation " *Et-ih'alat* April 6, 1953.

At the time, for democratic nationalists, the conditions of conceivability for understanding the United States as an enemy did not yet exist. According to Saïd Fatemi, the personal translator of Mussadiq and the nephew of Hussein Fatemi—Iran's foreign minister at the time, Mussadiq was occasionally told of British spies infiltrating the government, but Mussadiq would confidently respond, "Let them be so they know what it is that we are doing."<sup>68</sup> To Mussadiq, the British conspiracy against him and Iran was an act of British nature, but the United States was not yet imagined as an enemy.

In his radio speech after the failed February coup in 1953, which turned out to be a practice run for the August coup, Mussadiq reported the details of what had occurred without mentioning one word about the American involvement. But his speech was full of references to the role of Britain. He said:

Colonial governments are adaptive to their conditions; they have always misused any type of internal differences for their own sinister end. For the last 150 years, whoever has struggled to defend the interest our nation, they have eliminated them with treachery and duplicity. . . . From the 1921 coup until now, the British have wanted to see me in despair and defeat.<sup>69</sup>

Then he reminded the people of his suffering, imprisonment, exile, and at least two assassination attempts perpetrated by the British. He concluded:

The February event was yet another instance of our national enemy conspiring against our people. However, the people of Iran were aware of the truth and, once more, they did not allow the enemies of Iran to defeat our national movement.<sup>70</sup>

In the text, which is typical of the official texts during the months leading to the coup, Britain is the main enemy of Iran, Mussadiq is the savior of Iranian nationalism, and "true" Iranians are those who oppose Britain, disengage from the Soviet Union, and support Mussadiq. In other

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<sup>68</sup> Saïd Fātemi, *Mussadiq's Challenges*, Speech for Iranian Cultural Society of South Florida, unpublished.

<sup>69</sup> Mussadiq, "The Prime Minister Raido Message to the Nation ".

<sup>70</sup> Bill and Louis, eds., *Mussaddiq, Iranian Nationalization and Oil*, p. 222.

words, democratic nationalists represented their friends and foes according to a particular identity formation that reinforced the perception of Self in relation to Others.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter demonstrated how Mussadiq came to power by captivating the collective imagination of the nation by unifying them against the AIOC, which symbolized the British colonial policies. In a seemingly routine trade negotiation, the once celebrated 1933 Agreement, like a ghost from the past, began to haunt Britain, the shah, and their allies while it loosely connected otherwise competing discourses. In a relatively short period, democratic nationalists represented British ownership of Iran's oil industry for all its ills, for example, poverty, corruption, and intervention and/or domination of foreign powers. This promotional practice unified the otherwise competing identities into an ideological bloc against Britain. This bloc became the source of power for democratic nationalists to impose their identity on the state. Once in power, constitutive of the state identity, policies of state building, nation imagining, and foreign policymaking were pursued accordingly.

After a year in power, as the government appeared to be winning its struggle against the AIOC, Mussadiq's ideological bloc began to collapse, and various contending discourses once again began to pursue their respective idealized nation-state. However, had it not been for the military interference of the United States, Mussadiq's government would have survived. In fact, on February 28, 1953, Mussadiq embarrassed Mohamad Reza Shah when he easily foiled a coup attempt against his government. He arrested some of the same state-paid hooligans who had been released from prison on August 19 so they could beat, injure, and kill opponents of Mohamad Reza Shah and attack Mussadiq and his supporters.<sup>71</sup> In the weeks preceding the August coup,

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<sup>71</sup> One of the better known figures who led the February 28 coup was *Shaban Jafary*, also known as *Bee-Mukh* (the Brainless or the Bully). On February 28, he led his street gang, intent on murdering Mussadiq as he was coming out

Mussadiq “was very well aware that a coup was being planned, but he could not imagine that the United States would get involved with an illegal and undemocratic act.”<sup>72</sup> Indeed, Mussadiq did not see the United States as an enemy. Hence, he was confident that his government would survive any possible coup attempt by Britain. He was so overconfident that as the August coup was well under way, he mistook the initial setback by the coup makers as another success. Thus, to prevent bloodshed, he did not mobilize his popular support. According to eyewitnesses, up to 3 p.m. on the afternoon of August 19, the street protests in Tehran looked as normal as any other day. Although various opposing identities intensely competed to take over the state, had it not been for the U.S.-backed coup, the chances for Mussadiq’s government survival would have been high, for no other identity had the breadth and the depth of Mussadiq’s popular support.<sup>73</sup>

After the coup, once again, the people were represented in a relational opposition to the foreign others, which turned out to be the United States and Mohamad Reza Shah. I will illustrate these practices in Chapters 6.

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of an arranged meeting with the shah, but Mussadiq escaped. Ironically, when the shah’s brother was questioned about the security of the palace or lack thereof, he responded: “People are free to demonstrate anywhere they want.” Notwithstanding the irony of this statement after the bloody and repressive years of the coup, on August 19, once again, *Shaba’n the Brainless*, escorted by military personnel carriers, led his gang to Mussadiq’s house. Again, for the purpose of killing him.

<sup>72</sup> A personal interview with Dr. Said Fatemi, nephew of Dr. Hussein Fatemi, and the official translator of Mussadiq during the hearing in the International Court of Justice. Florida International University, conference arranged by the Iranian Cultural Society, 1999.

<sup>73</sup> For politics of interventions, see Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 419.

## CHAPTER 6 THE CONSTRUCTION AND COLLAPSE OF MODERN MONARCHISM (1953-1979)

### **Introduction**

This chapter discusses how the state official discourse alienated itself from its own society and provided a conducive condition for constructing a hegemonic bloc against the state. This chapter reviews four successive eras of restoration, reform, consolidation, and collapse of the shah by demonstrating how the official state practices delegitimized the regime and facilitated the establishment of an Islamic state. The processes of delegitimization of the state occurred despite the state's having an absolute monopoly over all the means of violence and repression. In this era, the state's practices and policies did not produce the legitimacy the state sought, nor did they convey the messages the state intended.

First, I will explain how the restoration era began when the CIA overthrew Mussadiq's government and ended as the Kennedy administration came to power in January 1961. During this era, the discourse of monarchic modernism lost much of its representational power. For a majority of the people, the state's discourse became the language of domination rather than productive means for producing legitimacy and building consensus. Accordingly, the state failed to project onto the society its interpretation of legitimacy. In contrast, contending discourses succeeded in representing the shah as a delegitimate agent of the United States, a country depicted as an imperialistic power. Contending discourses also devalued the state's modernization as Western domination and the state social norms as unacceptable and corrupt.

Second, the era of reform began 1961 and ended in 1964. As the impetus for the 1953 CIA coup had begun with the shift of power from the Truman administration to the Eisenhower administration, the "reform era" also began with the shift of power from the Eisenhower administration's to the Kennedy administration. During the early 1960s, fearing a revolution in

Iran, the Kennedy administration pressured the shah to be less obsessed with security and military build-up and instead be more interested in investing in economic and political reform. As a result of this shift, the shah reluctantly appointed Ali Amini, a man Kennedy preferred to lead a reformist government in Iran. Eventually, Amini's government failed, but the shah adopted some of Kennedy's reformist agenda.

However, the shah's reform delegitimized the state further, even among conservative clerics and landed elites—the shah's traditional supporters in modern Iran—in addition to his previous opposition by nationalists and socialists. The “reform” resulted in increasing the size of the state with concentrating its power in the hands of the shah and a small circle of his cronies who controlled all state resources and institutions. By 1964, once again, the United States Iran policy shifted from economic reform back to security issues. So the reform era ended, and the era of consolidation of power began in a shah-centered state backed by the United States.

Third, the era of absolute consolidation of power began when the state revenues increased to the extent Iran no longer needed foreign aid and loans. During this era, the shah-centered state's representation of its practices and policies began to be interpreted according to, and associated with, two different webs of meanings. In the official state discourse, the shah was represented as the provider of security, law, progress, justice, and ethics, but he was also seen as the divine embodiment of the Persian-Aryan nation. In addition, he was viewed as the key player for Iran's alliance with the West in general and the United States specifically. However, for a great majority of Iranians, the shah's language and practices were interpreted as the means of foreign the social reality of domination and quiescence. In contrast to apolitical Iranians, for political activists who were embedded in the discourses of democratic nationalism, socialism, and Islamism, a common language of resistance was being formed. Increasingly, political



activists represented the shah-centered state as the hired-hand or the “Servant of American imperialism,” although for each group of activists, the meaning of “imperialism” differed. For Islamists, imperialism meant an imperial non-Muslim power. For socialists, imperialism meant a non-proletarian power. For nationalists, imperialism meant a non-Iranian sovereign.

Nevertheless, the association between the shah and U.S. imperialism was articulated by the same words, images, and even associated with the same narrative of experiences—the 1953 CIA coup.

Fourth, the era of collapse began at the height of the shah’s power. A hegemonic bloc of contending discourses began to communicate with a common language of resistance against the Iran-U.S. alliance. This hegemonic discourse glorified a life-and-death struggle against the Mohamad Reza Shah and the United States.

Accordingly, a shift occurred in the rationality constructed in the language. In this shift, acquiescence to the power of the shah and the United States was devalued, and in contrast the struggle against the shah and the United States became a respectable social value. Writers, poets, movie-makers, actors, and religious clerics whom the shah had imprisoned became the role models of resistance against the unjust regime. In other words, the language that political activists had articulated for decades permeated into a common language of the people.

Accordingly, values, concepts, and rationalities associated with resisting, fighting, and dying for the common cause overthrowing the regime, became a part of the language. In this hegemony, while the differences among socialists, nationalists, and Islamists were totally muted, the ideal of struggling against the regime was privileged.

In this hegemony, material and institutional resources available to the state were interpreted differently. Unlike previous eras during which the state’s monopoly of means of coercion, surveillance, control, discipline, and governance were interpreted as omnipotent,

fearsome, and indestructible, suddenly the same resources and institutions were interpreted as impotent, benign, and fragile. Instead, contending discourses represented the unity of the people as omnipotent.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to previous eras, in these shifts, the people no longer feared the shah and his coercive means, and they did not imagine the United State as a powerful state. Previously, Iranians had quietly accepted the shah's representation of development, law, class-justice, and social norms as a natural reality of the time, but suddenly they no longer accepted them as such. In fact, what was accepted as social reality began to anger them as unethical norms that had to be stopped. Moreover, the shah providing "security for the country" was understood in terms of insecurity for the people.

In sum, the shah-centered state lost its productive power to discipline and punish, regulate and control, naturalize power relations, create quiescence among people, and construct consensus and shared beliefs. The shah-centered state lost its legitimacy. At that point, the condition of conceivability for imaging anything else but a violent overthrow of the regime became impossible.

As the shah's regime was collapsing, "Islam" became the primary signifier under which a great majority of people united with one voice—the shah must go and Khomeini must rule. But in this unison, a multiplicity of voices, concepts, values, and rationalities arose, which were previously constructed in contending discourses in Iran. Nevertheless, for a particular moment in the time and space of the collective imagination of an overwhelming number of Iranians, a monolithic voice appeared that identified Self in an opposition relation with the shah as its main

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<sup>1</sup> However, this unity formally disappeared only 24 days after the establishment of the Islamic Republic when the state ordered all female employees to wear *Hejab* (the Islamic dress code).

Other. The result was the collapse of the regime. In brief, this chapter is about the construction and deconstruction of the official state discourse from 1953 to 1979.

### **Part I: Restoration of the Discourse of Modern Monarchism (1953-1979)**

After the coup on August 19, 1953, the state began a two-prong policy of eliminating its opposition and simultaneously building its particular vision of the state. Considering U.S. economic and military aid, the granting of various loan packages, and the lifting of the embargo on Iran's oil export, all of which had followed immediately after the coup, the state gained the material power to physically repress its opposition and pursue its particular vision of state-building, nation-imaging, and conducting foreign policy. However, while the state succeeded in eliminating its opposition and somewhat muting the voices of opposition, it failed to influence, shape, or permeate values, concepts, and rationalities embedded in, and expressed by, contending discourses. It seemed that the state spoke in one language and the society mistranslated it into several other languages. In this divide, the state represented itself as a modernizing state headed by the shah as the provider of security and the embodiment of law, nationhood, equality, and Islamic ethics. However, a great majority of the people interpreted the state as an omnipotent foreign entity to be avoided if possible, but to be accepted as necessitated by social reality. In this social environment, while the Iranian society in general acquiesced in the omnipotency of the state, subversive voices of contending discourses appeared in the heavily censored non-official texts. In this section, I compare values, concepts, and rationalities produced by the state with the subversive voices of discontent coming from the contending discourses and devaluing the state language as one of deceit, threat, and domination.

#### **Building and Securitizing the State**

After the 1953 coup, in a series of relational linkages and differences, the state was represented as the embodiment of the shah threatened by internal and external enemies. With this

relational logic, the shah began to appropriate the largest portion of the state's budget to build up a military that was too small to oppose the Soviet Union's supreme conventional forces and too big and blunt for crashing internal unrest or uprisings. Nevertheless, having internal and external enemies for the regime constituted the logic behind the state's securitization policy.

Constitutive of this securitization was the full backing of the Eisenhower administration, which helped the shah eliminate his opposition and begin to build a police state personified by the shah, who represented the embodiment of progress, law, people, justice, and Islamic norms. The shah began to represent communists, nationalists, and Islamic fanatics as threats to the state monarchic order, Persian-Aryan nationalism, and Iran's alliance with the West.

From the day after the coup, the state began a brutal round of executions, imprisonments, and deportation of many of the well-known leaders of the opposition. It also banned these leaders' organizations and muted their voices.<sup>2</sup> In these practices, the communist Tudeh Party paid the heaviest price because the threat of communism was the defining enemy for the state's articulatory logic. By the end of 1953, at least 2,300 members of the Tudeh Party were arrested.<sup>3</sup> In addition to communists, nationalists were also rounded up. Mussadiq spent three years in prison and then was put under house arrest until his death. Hussein Fatemi, whose newspaper articles, speeches, and actions had turned him into a heroic figure for nationalists, was executed by a firing squad. He was put to death because of his fiery speeches against the shah's illegal acts against the government and his alliance with the CIA and Britain.

In the official state discourse, the shah was represented as the embodiment of the state and the people. Constitutive of this representation was the logic of the shah's campaign to represent

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<sup>2</sup> Jame A Bill, *The Eagle Adn the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 98-100.

<sup>3</sup> Pahlavi Mohammed Reza, "The Shahanshah Message to the Nation " *Ettelaat*, August 23, 1953.

the coup as a “the people’s resurrection,” “people’s revolution,” or “the shah and people’s uprising.”<sup>4</sup> However, for three days preceding the coup, the narrative attached to the coup was different. In newspapers, the shah had escaped from Tehran, fearing his people. Additionally, for hundreds of thousands of people who had been mobilized in support of Mussadiq during the tumultuous years preceding the coup, the shah’s representation of the 1953 coup as “the people’s uprising” appeared to be a hollow campaign of repression and empty words because, in this case, the state’s representation did not match the existential experience of most people. Therefore, from the first days of restoring the shah’s regime, two different narratives were linked to the same event—official and non-official. For a great majority of the people, the coup represented foreign domination headed by the shah. For the state, the coup meant the “people’s resurrection,” supported by Self-like Western allies against enemies of Iran and Western democracies. While the state’s official narrative continued until the regime fell in 1979, the societal unofficial version lived on despite the passage of time and the state’s tremendous power to try to propagate its vision.

In other words, although the state succeeded in the physical repression of opposing persons, groups, organizations, and political parties, it failed to eliminate their voices in the language. The result was the construction of two languages: the language with which the state represented and understood itself and the language with which the people understood the state. In this section, I will explain the official discourse of the state and then I will review the language of resistance to the state.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, see major headlines of Etteaalat and Keyhan during the first month after the coup.

## Imagining the Nation

### The Shah as the Embodiment of the Nation-state

On August 22, 1953, Mohamad Reza Shah attached a new narrative to the coup upon his return from Rome to Tehran. By addressing the nation via state national radio, Mohamad Reza Shah thanked the nation for rising up in his support:

My dear people, how can I thank you for your resoluteness in wanting to preserve your national ideals and your shah by willing to sacrifice your own lives and becoming martyrs for my *nation*. As you know [referring to previous assassination attempts on his life, which he claimed were signs of divine protection extended to him by Shi'i Imams], I have done the same in the past. I was also ready to die for my nation a few times . . . and why should one refuse the honor of sacrificing self for the people who readily give up their lives for me; indeed, I would give up my life for them.<sup>5</sup>

In this representation, the people demonstrators and agitators whom the CIA organized were represented as the people. However, those who were being rounded up while Mohamad Reza Shah was speaking did not constitute the people.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the previous assassination attempts on Mohamad Reza Shah's life were represented as voluntary acts of self-sacrifice for the people in the same way people sacrificed themselves for him. Although no known supporter of Mohamad Reza Shah lost his life during the coup, he represented them as imagined people who sacrificed their lives for him thus for the nation in the same way the Shah would have sacrificed his life for the people had he not been protected by some divine power.<sup>7</sup> In other words, in the discourse of the state, the Shah and people were united in both body and spirit; each would die to save the other and neither could live without the other. Moreover, what is interesting in this

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<sup>5</sup> Mohammed Reza, *Mission for My Country*.

<sup>6</sup> For the lack of

<sup>7</sup> For the shah's contention that he was being protected or guided, see Pahlavi Mohammed Reza, *White Revolution* (Iran National Bank/ bank-e meli-i Iran 1966/1345), Mohammed Reza, *Answer to History*. Mohammed Reza, *Answer to History*.

representation was Mohamad Reza Shah's appeal to the Shi'i myth of martyrdom and self-sacrifice.

By classifying the shah and the people into a singular body and spirit, Mohamad Reza Shah became the embodiment of the people's body and mind and thus the sovereign, the law, and the nation. Note that he referred to the "people" and the "nation" as "my people" and "my nation" in an authoritative tone that obviously pointed out his relational position as a proprietor of both. This tone and theme was a typical relational position Mohamad Reza Shah took even when he lost his thrown.<sup>8</sup>

By referring to his near-death experience, Mohamad Reza Shah invoked the Islamic concept *Shahadat* (martyrdom) and the Shi'i concept of *Shifa'at* (request for protection) to represent himself as a faithful Islamic-Shi'i leader. In other words, he would be ready to sacrifice self for the divine cause of the nation.

The logic of being under the protection of, or being favored by, Imams is a Shi'i concept (*Shafa'at*) that roughly means "the people," who are presumed to be natural sinners and thus fallible. The people can appeal to the naturally innocent and infallible Imams who could possibly grant them their wishes or protect them from hazardous situations. It is not, however, clear whether Imams are the mediators between the people and God, the granters or protectors of the forgiven sinner themselves. This concept is one of the bases for the Shi'i ritual of visiting the holy shrines of Imams, a concept that was repeatedly invoked by Mohamad Reza Shah.

To reinforce that he was a faithful Islamic leader in addition to being a modern one, Mohamad Reza Shah used to make periodic pilgrimages to Mecca, Karbala, Qum, and Mashad. These frequent pilgrimages represented Mohamad Reza Shah as a faithful Muslim ruler whom

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<sup>8</sup> Mohammed Reza, *Mission for My Country*.

Shi'i Imams protected and guided.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, by allowing prominent religious leaders, “especially Ayatollah Bourujerdi, Ayatollah Behbahni and the Imam Jome-eh of Tehran” to continue easy access to the court, he reinforced these images.<sup>10</sup> During weekly radio broadcasts, Ayatollah Falsafi, “the able religious preacher, was given a weekly [program] on the state radio in which, for many years, he did not merely deliver religious sermons and counsel, but also engaged in biting polemics against ‘materialists,’ Mussadiq and the Popular Movement.”<sup>11</sup>

These practices seemingly contradicted the logic of being an ultra modern man. But they made sense in the state discourse of modern monarchism, which symbolized the singularity of Mohamad Reza Shah as not only a modern monarch of a Persian-Aryan nation, but also a Sultan of a nation of Muslims with the divine blessing of God upon his thrown.<sup>12</sup> This was the theme Mohamad Reza Shah set for his regime after the coup, that is, he was supposedly the absolute and divine sovereign whose unity with the people protected the nation, modernized the country, and maintained Iran’s alliance with the West against the threat of international communism.

### **The People: The Official Representation of Civil Society**

With the restoration of the regime by the state, the state began to represent itself as a democratic monarchy, which had a mandate from its active civil society and civil organizations. This rhetorical practice made sense because during Mussadiq’s era, the concept of “people’s sovereignty” had become a hegemonic concept. After the coup, the state was compelled to value what had entered the language as “people’s rights.” After all, the coup was represented as the

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<sup>9</sup> For the shah’s contention that he was being protected or guided, see ———, *White Revolution*, Mohammed Reza, *Answer to History*. Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 421.

<sup>10</sup> Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979*, p. 193.

<sup>11</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, Keddie and Richard, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, Katouzian, *Musaddiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran*.

<sup>12</sup> This representation was an added nuance that was not prominent during Reza Shah, although Reza Shah also represented himself as a religious Muslim believer who cared about the spirit of Islam and not its traditional rituals.



resurrection of the people. Discursively, therefore, it would make sense to have an officially formed civil society. Why did the state feel compelled to represent itself as being democratic and responsive to the people's mandate? After all, during Reza Shah's reign, the concept of having a mandate from the people or civil society did not exist in Mohammad Reza Shah's logic.

In previous chapters, I noted that during the discourse of monarchic absolutism in pre-modern Iran, the logic of the relation between the state and the people was based on the state being the protector of the people—not their representative. In modern Iran, this relational logic began to shift from one discourse to another. In the discourse of constitutionalism, the people continued to be represented as the securitized subjects of the state, and the state was represented as the embodiment of the *law*. Thus, the law turned into the securing agent of the state. During the discourse of modern absolutism practiced by Reza Shah, the people continued to be represented as the securitized subjects of the shah-centered state and the state as the securing agent, as well as modernizing one.

However, after the fall of Reza Shah's regime in 1941, competing discourses of socialism, Islamism, and nationalism began to mobilize millions of people by representing the people as active participants in their respective civil societies, although the content of civil society differed according to contending discourses. Socialists (the unions of workers and their voices), Islamists (the faithful Muslims), and nationalists (Iranian citizens) constituted the social content of the various forms of civil society.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, no dominant discourse represented the people as the passive subjects of the state, as it had been done previously.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, contending discourses, including the state discourse, represented the people as active participants in state-

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<sup>13</sup> For competing groups, unions, and parties, see, Mohammed Reza, *Mission for My Country*, p. 173.

<sup>14</sup> See chapter 5.

building, nation-imaginings, and decision-making in foreign relations. Constructing an official approved society was an inversion of the relational logic between the people and the state, and the state was compelled to follow this logic by discursively changing it. In this inversion, the state became the object of the people's desire for sovereignty, development, law, justice, and enforcing social norms rather than the people being represented as the passive subjects of the state. After the coup in 1953, this mode of rationality continued, and the state continue its repressive policies, but always in the name of "the people."

From the perspective of this relational logic, the state represented itself as a modern democratic Persian-monarchy backed by a series of civil society organizations, comprised of loyal citizens to the shah and thus to the state. This representation practice created a paradox for the state. On the one hand, the state "felt compelled" to construct an active, supportive civil society. On the other hand, the state "felt compelled" to make sure that the civil society remained loyal to the state and thus loyal to Mohamad Reza Shah. For example, Mohamad Reza Shah wrote, "As we Persians see it, the human values inherent in true political democracy merit whatever price we have to pay for it." He stated, "In free countries everywhere, parties must be created by leaders who enjoy support."<sup>15</sup> He then rejected those who criticized the state for forming parties:

[As being] from the top rather than rising from the rank and file of the people. Some cynics even claim that the parties are mere puppets of the Government or the Crown. That of course misses the whole point about how you can foster parties in a newly developing country such as Iran.<sup>15</sup>

This rhetorical relation between the people and the state meant that the *raison d'être* for the state was supposed to be a mandate by the people, but guided by the state, which was Mohamad Reza Shah. In contrast, during Reza Shah's era, the state *raison d'être* was

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<sup>15</sup> Bashiriyeh, *Mavanea Tosa'yea Syasi Dar Iran (Obstacles to Political Development in Iran)*, p. 72.

represented as historically determined, not mandated from the people. In fact, mandates from the people was represented as illogical. For example, Ali Akbar Davar, the Minister of Justice during Reza Shah's reign, suggested." "As logic dictates, a strong-willed and competent leader must lead this nation to its desired destiny [development]. The leader [Reza Shah] must impose upon the nation what is good for them, and must do what is necessary even if he has to use the force of whips."<sup>16</sup>

Unlike Reza Shah, who muted the 1921 British-backed *coup*, his son felt compelled to flaunt the 1953 *coup* as "the resurrection of the people."<sup>17</sup> For example, on August 24, 1953, the Society of August 19 Resurrection, a previously unknown group and perhaps associated with one of the CIA organized mobs, widely distributed and published its first declaration, which followed the same argumentation as those of Mohamad Reza Shah and Zahedi's addresses, but with "the voice of the people:"

Our dear compatriots, the August 19 Resurrection succeeded because *Muslim*

*toilers . . . and citizen patriots* sacrificed their lives . . . and freed themselves from the terror of Mussadiq's government, which had become the horrific house of *foreigners* and Bolsheviks . . . a government that spoke of democratic nationalism but wanted to depose our *innocent and beloved shah*. . . . People must now be aware that the Justice, Education, and Labor Departments are still under the control of foreigners. . . . People must not take their silences for their submissions. . . . These hired hands of foreigners are like poisonous snakes lying in their hidden dens and ready to strike our country and contaminate our environment. . . . [Therefore] it is not enough that our national hero, General Zahedi, has saved the nation from their fangs. . . . We have now the obligation to obey the decrees issued by of our *innocent and beloved shah* and follow his vision in his purpose to secure us from the internal and external threats . . . [so that the shah] can improve our security, wealth, and fortunes.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> "The First Declaration of the Society of August 19 Resurrection " *Ettelaat* 1953.

<sup>17</sup> Despite the weight of evidence detailing all aspects of the 1953 coup, the shah's loyal supporters still refer to the 1953 coup as "the day of national uprising (*rouz-e qyam-e mardom* or *mellat*).

<sup>18</sup> "The Daily Current " *Ettellaat* 1953, Sep. 3, 4, 5, 8, and 9 Emphasis added.

This text, although blatantly frank, was a typical representation of how the state tried to construct a performative and officially approved civil society, which represented the unity of the shah, state, people, and Islam. In this text, Mohamad Reza Shah is represented as an absolute sovereign intent to secure Iran and develop his nation. The text makes no conceptual distinction between the shah and concepts such as sovereignty, development, nation, law, and national interest or norms. In other words, the shah embodies all those concepts as Self, and what he opposes is the embodiment of Others—the foreigners. The people are represented as a homogenous singular body of Iranian citizen-subjects obligated to follow the shah’s command as the natural law of the nation—a nation whose security and fortune depended upon the shah’s success to secure and develop it.

In this text, besides representing Mohamad Reza Shah as a modern Iranian monarch linked to ancient Persian kings and thus Iranian-Aryan nationalism—a construction that had become prominent during Reza Shah’s era, he is also represented as a Shi’i Sultan. By referring to Mohamad Reza Shah as an *innocent* and *beloved* Muslim leader, the text invoked the traditional logic of the divine sovereignty of Sultanate embedded in pre-modern texts. In other words, Mohamad Reza Shah is represented as the legitimate ruler of the “nation of Islam” and for Shi’ites until the return of the innocent, infallible, and the ultimate terrestrial sovereign of all Muslims, Imam Mahdi. While the text tries to gloss over Mohamad Reza Shah with shades of divine Islamic and Shi’i sovereignty, it bestows upon him a mandate issued by Iranian *citizens* and *Muslim toilers* of Iran. This seemingly paradoxical practice, which now plays a prominent role in the practices of the Islamic Republic, continued until 1979.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> This is paradoxical because the regime tries to exercise the right of citizenship through the concept of divine sovereignty, but, at the same time, it recognizes the right of citizenship and political participation.

In accordance with this logic, civil society organizations, such as the media, academia, unions, parties, and individuals, reproduced a particular language that was easily recognized as the official state language. This language had a monotonous theme and tone used immediately after the coup, and it continued throughout the regime.

For example, *Ettellaat* began publishing a series of front-page editorial pieces. These editorials, which ran for a few months, were samples of how the officially approved civil society reproduced the language of the state. For instance, in its September 3, 1953, issue, the editorial entitled, “The Government’s First Step” argued the importance of settling disputes with Britain and reestablishing a strong and secured alliance with the West. In its September 4 issue, the editorial entitled, “The Economy after Establishing Security” represented Mohamad Reza Shah as the provider of security without whom the economic life of the nation would suffer. Again, in the September 5 and 6 issues the titles read, “America’s Immediate Aid to Iran” and “Economic Reform: A Step by Step Process.” These two pieces explained that the economic restructuring was possible only if the United States invested in, and backed, Iran in its economic recovery. While September 8 editorial titled “Respect for Law” represented law as the foundation for the building of an orderly and just society. It argued for a strong leader to enforce the law. The starting point for the September 9 editorial titled “Economic Equality for All” was the government’s intention to improve the economy. The September 18 editorial titled, “This Year’s Quiet and Orderly Commemoration of Imam Hussein” argued that “true” Islamic rituals are peaceful and respectful of law and order.<sup>20</sup> Other revealing titles included: “Foreign Investments,” “Twelve Years of Monarchic Rule,” “How to Understand Iran,” “Cleansing the

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<sup>20</sup> Mustafa Zamani, *Jalal Al-E Ahmad's Culture* (Tehran: Nashr-e Muaser 1982/1362), p. 158.

Culture,” “Fighting Corruption,” and “Equality under Law.”<sup>21</sup> In short, the theme of this particular newspaper, which had the highest circulation, continued to reflect the official language of the state. Meanwhile state censorship muted voices of the opposition. Jalal Al-e Ahmad, a famous Iranian essayist, political activist, and literary critic, observed:

From 1953 onward, we have had many colorful papers that appeal to, and aroused the best of our animal instincts, but they are all vacant of any spirituality, virtuosity, and righteousness. Meanwhile, none of them speaks of any serious problem. Worse than anything else, *they all speak with one language*. A language that is vacant of any identity and value [referring to the main newspapers in Iran], you can read the page 38 of one paper and then begin reading the page 39 of another paper without ever losing track of their content.<sup>22</sup>

This oppressive monotony in the official language of the state began to become the only language that could be expressed freely. The *Majlis* and cabinets lost their previous legislative autonomies and began to speak in the official language of the state. The two legal political parties, the Melioon Party and Party of Mardum (National and Peoples parties), became what Mohamad Reza Shah called the “loyal” and the “loyal opposition” parties.<sup>23</sup> And except for their differences in jockeying for posts by adulating Mohamad Reza Shah, no substantive differences existed between the two parties.<sup>24</sup> The state gradually began to ban all unions and associations and formed state-sponsored ones. Moreover, the state banned street protests, mass rallies, and strictly monitored and regulated religious rituals, a practice that began to alienate clerics who were otherwise supportive of the regime. Meanwhile, the state began to organize mass rallies on various state-sponsored anniversaries or when Mohamad Reza Shah attended grand openings or

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<sup>21</sup> See *Ettelaat* from August 20 to the end of the 1953 year.

<sup>22</sup> Mohammed Reza, *Mission for My Country*, p. 172. Emphasis added.

<sup>23</sup> Also see, Habib Ladjevardi, ed., *Memoris of Jafar Sharif-Emami; Prime Minister of Iran (1960-61 & 1978)*, (Iranian Oral History Project, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University, 1999), p. 188.

<sup>24</sup> For competition to get closer to the shah, see General Zahedi, "Premier Zahedi Radio Message," *Ettelaat*, August 23, 1953.

visited different locations. Occasionally, school principals felt compelled to cancel classes and accompany their students to these rallies. To make certain that students would not skip these rallies, class attendance was taken at these officially-approved rallies. In short, during the restoration period (1953-1961), the state tried to represent the people as active participants in loyal civil society organizations.

### **Security as a Disciplinary Practice: The Language of Repression**

With the restoration of Mohammad Reza Shah to power, the state language of repression began to become a part of the official state language and remained as such until a year before its fall. On August 24, 1953, for example, after Mohamad Reza Shah's address to the nation, General Fazlulah Zahedi, the new CIA-appointed prime minister, addressed the nation:

My dear compatriots, as drinking water can satiate thirst, I hope that his majesty's words satiated your thirst for healing this thirty-month old injury [referring to Mussadiq's government], which was caused by a few who neglected our national interests and misunderstood their patriotic obligations. However, considering the current dangers and threats to our country, I, who strictly follow his majesty's command and am now in charge of our national interests, first and foremost I demand the people's cooperation and then expect their endurance in years to come.<sup>25</sup>

In this text, General Zahedi set a repressive tone, a tone that demanded obedience of the people to the absolute command of Mohamad Reza Shah. Zahedi represented the act of obedience to Mohamad Reza Shah's command as the national obligation and moral duty of everyone. He also expected quiet obedience if possible, and implied enforcement of obedience if necessary. In this representation, the difference between Self and Other is the difference between quiescent obedience and resistance to the command of the shah and thus the command of the state. In this typical representation of the state, the CIA installed General Prime Minister labeled Mussadiq's government as injurious and negligent of Iran's national interests. Zahedi argued that Mussadiq

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979*, p. 196.

was the violator of his national obligation because of his disobedience to Mohamad Reza Shah's command. The repressive tone of othering continued to appear in various forms. Ironically, Zahedi also became the victim of the same repressive tone. In 1954, because of his disagreement with Mohamad Reza Shah, he was forced to resign his post and leave the country. As Zahedi was being escorted out of the country, he turned to his friends and said, "Poor Dr. Mussadiq was right after all!"<sup>26</sup>

A form of repression was how the state built the National Intelligence and Security Organization (SAVAK), which was equipped with highly advanced intelligence gathering mechanisms and training techniques provided by the United States.<sup>27</sup> This organization acted as "the eyes and ears" of the shah, which was traditionally a well-understood concept in the language, but never to the extent of trying to classify people into loyal citizens and disloyal foreigners. William Sullivan, the last U.S. ambassador to Iran, argued, "After considerable organizational effort by the CIA, the United States government devised for shah a framework of a modern intelligence system and helped him establish it."<sup>28</sup>

Accordingly, the state's secret police was structured to operate as most Western intelligence organizations do, that is, collecting intelligence on other countries, but it operated according to a different mode of rationality. Its main task was to investigate disloyalty to the shah-centered state by acting as Mohamad Reza Shah's private eyes, ears, and swords in charge of monitoring, regulating, and disciplining the loyal civil society organizations and punishing and terrorizing the disloyal ones. The power of SAVAK grew as the resources increased.

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<sup>26</sup> Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979*, p. 196. For example, see William H. Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1981), p. 96.

<sup>27</sup> James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*, pp. 95-96.



SAVAK agents were embedded in places ranging from factories to student organizations to government agencies, the military, the press, political parties, and so forth. In monthly, quarterly, and annual reports, SAVAK would report the details of political activities. It also speculated about the extent of threats and loyalty to the regime.<sup>29</sup> In a SAVAK document on the file it kept on members of Iran's Party (Mussadiq's defunct party), the officer in charge of the operation wants to know about the intention of the leaders of the Party of Iran. The officer poses two questions to the embedded agent: "Why do the leaders of the Iran Party seem to agree with Mohamad Reza Shah's proposal? Do they have some sinister intention of showing that they are close to the government?"<sup>30</sup>

Reflecting Mohamad Reza Shah's obsessive preoccupation with internal threats from disloyal enemies of the state, SAVAK terrorized the people. William Sullivan wrote:

There was a sort of reign of terror in Iran. Most prominent politicians, many westernized families, and persons from all over the realm were affected by it. There were many mysterious murders generalized use of torture in the prisons. . . . The quality of intelligence we [U.S.] received from our relations with [SAVAK] was [poor] . . . Washington analysts usually considered it of the Chicken Little variety. A Communist sky was always falling on our joint interests.<sup>31</sup>

However, for a great majority of the people, the perception of SAVAK's sinister eyes and ears everywhere created a political space in which the people knew what the government expected of them to do or to say. They knew what was considered as cooperative or interruptive (Ekhlal Gar) behavior—political correctness or incorrectness. A scant review of speeches, editorials, essays, official and non-official proclamations published in major newspapers or broadcast over the national radio at the time finds a monotonous theme and tone in these texts. In this oppressive

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<sup>29</sup> For example, see SAVAK documents in the Center for Islamic Revolution Documents.

<sup>30</sup> Siavash Yari, *The Iran Party According to the Documents* (Tehran: Center for Islamic Revolution Documents 2005), p. 199, document No. 159.

<sup>31</sup> Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*, pp. 97-99.

monotony of political correctness, the heterogeneous voices of contending discourses are completely absent. Instead, these voices began to speak in a different genre that became as distinctly recognizable as that of the official language of the state.

In contrast to the state official language, which was brutally straightforward, this contentious language of the opposition was, however, indirect, abstract, suggestive, and extremely subversive. Nevertheless, the opposition had the ability of communicating the message it intended. That language was the language of discontent expressed by public intellectuals such as Ahmad Shamlo, Hushang Golsheery, Jalal Ale-Ahmad, Samad Behrangi, Ali Shariati, Ayatollah Mutahri, Ayatollah Taleqani, and hundreds of other public intellectuals. This era was the beginning of a literary genre called “the committed literature.”<sup>32</sup> Later on, this language began to permeate into music, films, and short stories. In the next section, I discuss the construction of this language from the perspective of modern Islamists.

### **Economic Development**

In this era, the knowledge embedded in U.S. economic discourse of liberalism permeated the official language, policies, and practices of the state, not in its original liberal form, but as shah-centered policies. Preaching liberalism but acting despotic meant that while Mohamad Reza Shah preached economic liberalism, the state practiced it according to the official state discourse, which could only imagine a shah-centered economic planning and development approach.

During the 1950s, the epistemic knowledge for the state’s theory of economic development was based on liberal economic theories, which advocated separating economics from politics. The liberal policies promoted by the United States encouraged privately owned and operated

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<sup>32</sup> See Hamid Dabashi and NetLibrary Inc., *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1993). Also, Mohamad Mukhtari, *Practicing Tolerance* (Tehran: Entesharat Vistar, 1377/1998). Also, Aliquli Alikhani, ed., *The Complete Notes of Assaddollah Alam (Yad Dasht-Haay-E Alam)*, 5 vols. (Tehran: Maziar, 1385).

developmental projects and devalued state-owned and state-operated industries. The assumption of this body knowledge was that by liberalizing the market, the political system would automatically liberalize politics. In other words, the logic of the liberal economic discourse was based on the relational opposition between the concepts of the state and economic development. The logic of monarchic modernism, however, was based on the relational equivalence between the concept of the state and economic development. The differences in the relational logic between these two discourses resulted in disappointing the advocates of economic liberalism in three different ways.

First, liberal economic models did not liberalize the economy. Second, these models did not change the shah-centered policy of Iran. Third, they did not improve the lives of the people; instead, they widened the economic, political, and social divide between the state and society. In other words, rather than articulating the political from the economic, as economic liberalism does, the state politicized the economy to a greater extent than previous eras.

The state became the primary holder of the means of production, distribution, and investment. But, most importantly, the state also became the arena in which political and economic actors competed. In this shah-centered polity, various personalities in the court, cabinets, and ministries competed for gaining or maintaining the trust of Mohamad Reza Shah. This competition constructed a different relational logic from those of liberal economic theories. In this relational logic, developmental projects, policies, and practices were valued in terms of how they glorified the shah-centered state. Therefore, the state-elites competed for gaining and maintaining Mohamad Reza Shah's trust and attention. This arena of competition produced losers and winners according to its own internal logic. Unlike an ideal liberal economic model in which the productivity of a given project indicates its success or failure, in the shah-centered

economic model, the measure of success or failure was how a given project would please Mohamad Reza Shah. The state-elites intensely competed against each other, not for productive efficiency, but for pleasing Mohamad Reza Shah.<sup>33</sup> In other words, although the liberal economic theories of modernization had permeated various contending discourses in Iran, they were interpreted, understood, and practiced in accordance to the internal logic of the official state discourse—monarchic modernism. The next three sections explain this relational logic.

### **Representation of Nationalization**

After the coup in 1953, while the state continued to value its own version of nationalization, it represented Mussadiq's dispute with Britain in a different relational logic. The state represented Iran's oil dispute with Britain as the betrayal of the country's national interest because it damaged Iran's alliance with the West. The strategy to improve the public images of Britain in Iran, the state represented Britain as a part of the Western alliance and thus an ally of Iran, not the owner and operator of Iran's oil industry or a power that had attempted to colonize Iran. Moreover, Britain was represented in terms of its people and not its government. For example, Mohamad Reza Shah wrote:

The free Western peoples have shown a willingness to extend to us much economic and technical aid, and at the same time, they have in recent years rarely meddled in our affairs. For example, in proportion to her population, Britain now provides more assistance than any other country in the world, and we are happy to be among the recipients.<sup>34</sup>

In this text, Britain is represented as a part of the Western world, but not as a colonizing state. The British are represented as respectful of Iran's sovereignty, and, most importantly, they now help the people of the world, including Iran. By transformation the image of Britain from a colonizing state to aiding Iranians, the negotiation over the oil dispute became possible and even

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<sup>33</sup> Alikhani, ed., *The Complete Notes of Assaddollah Alam (Yad Dasht-Haay-E Alam)*, v.2, p. 83

<sup>34</sup> See Mohammed Reza, *Mission for My Country*, p. 298.

desirable. In practical terms, the negotiation resulted in recognizing the sovereign right of Iran over its oil resources. Meanwhile, Iran accepted a 50-50 profit sharing scheme, and it agreed to compensate the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) £25 million for its losses. Additionally, the state agreed to the formation of a consortium of oil companies, which paid more than \$600 million to British Petroleum (BP) for 60% of its share. In short, the result of the *coup* transformed not only Iran-U.S. relations by bringing about an economic bonanza for eight American oil companies that ended up owning 40% of the former AIOC, but it also guaranteed oil supplies for Britain. Meanwhile, Iran maintained its performative control over its oil resources, which the regime represented as a national victory and the contending discourses depicted as a national defeat.<sup>35</sup>

Although the image of Britain was being reconstructed, the state could not avoid values attached to the concept of nationalization, which had become a national value during Mussadiq's government. Therefore, the state valued nationalization while it discursively subverted the meaning of nationalizing. Ali Amini, Iran's chief negotiator in the settlement of the oil disputes in 1954, referred to this national value, that is, nationalization, as an unavoidable "national disease" that everyone had to adhere to.<sup>36</sup> The "national disease" that Amini refers was a trace from the past. Anything labeled foreign-owned or foreign-operated was understood as being against the Iranian national interest.

Accordingly, Mohamad Reza Shah adopted Mussadiq's language of nationalization. He not only began to take credit for the nationalization of oil industries, which he had once opposed, but he started a new round of nationalization. During his land reform in 1963, he ordered the

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<sup>35</sup> Keddie and Richard, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, pp. 136-137.

<sup>36</sup> Habib Ladjevardi, ed., *Memoirs of Ali Amini: Prime Minister of Iran (1961-62)*, (Iranian Oral History Project, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University, 1999), p. 85.

nationalization of Iran's water resources, natural fisheries, forest, communal, and pastoral lands. However, in contrast to Mussadiq's nationalization plan, these resources were already communal properties and neither foreigners nor any individuals claimed them. Nevertheless, because the concept of "nationalization" had entered the language as the patriotic value of disowning foreigners of Iranian-owned properties, Mohamad Reza Shah used that language to transfer the previously understood communal properties into the state-owned national property.<sup>37</sup> In other words, the conceptual value, which was previously constructed in Mussadiq's era, made it possible, desirable, and imaginable for Mohamad Reza Shah to label his monopolization of communal properties as "nationalization." The opposition, however, did not see these practices as "true" nationalization.

### **Official Representation of Economic "Liberalism"**

After the 1953 coup, the United States produced the knowledge for Iran's economic development, but Iran practiced economic liberalism according to logic different from that of U.S. economic liberalism. Although the Iranian state-elites represented economic liberalism as the solution for all of Iran's problems, they violated the tenets of liberal economics.<sup>38</sup>

In this era, the epistemic community associated with liberal international institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as well as American institutions such as the Ford Foundation, Harvard Graduate School of Public Administration, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and at least 30 American consulting firms, began to advise Iran on how to develop the economy.<sup>39</sup> The primary concern of this body of knowledge was to take politics

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<sup>37</sup> Mohammed Reza, *White Revolution*.

<sup>38</sup> Habib Ladjvardi, "Abolhassan Ebtehaj," in *Iranian Oral History Project / Harvard University Center for Middle Eastern Studies* (Iranian Oral History Project | Harvard University Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1960).

<sup>39</sup> Based on Khordad Farmanfarman interview at <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~iohp/firouz.html>, The Iranian Oral History Project at Harvard University. Also quoted in Baldwin, *Planning and Development in Iran*, pp.22-40.

out of economics by designing an autonomous political institution that was mainly run by economists, bankers, project managers, engineers, and field specialists. From this perspective, the defunct Plan Organization (PO) at the end of Mussadiq's era was reformed and re-staffed with Americans or American-educated staff. In 1954, Abdul Hassan Ebtehaj, a respected economist and a British-trained banker, who had been closely involved with the Overseas Consultants Incorporated (OCI) before Mussadiq's cabinet, left his post as the director of the IMF's Middle East Department to head the Plan Organization.<sup>40</sup> The very design of the PO was to depoliticize economic development because politics was too corrupt and personalistic, and the society was disabled, discontent, and poor.

According to George Baldwin, one of the seven original members of the Harvard Advisory Group, most of the educated and younger generation expected the imminent fall of the regime because the Tehran-centered government was overburdened with inefficiency, corruption, and low morale. He gave a bleak but realistic assessment of the situation:

[While the government plays] a sort of perpetual musical chairs of personal politics . . . there is no strongly felt social ethic, no ideological yeast at work in society. . . . Public policies, administrative decisions, and national development plans all have to be made with . . . unreliable information . . . [or] sources of information . . . [such as] libraries and files, annual reports . . . or professional societies and journals.<sup>41</sup>

Baldwin reasoned that U.S. experts designed the Plan Organization to immunize developmental projects from the corrupt and personalistic politics in Iran. Notwithstanding the irony that the U.S. government had overthrown Mussadiq's regime to bring the personalistic rule of Mohamad Reza Shah to power, the experts succeeded in organizing the PO to be functionally and financially a government within a government. However, they failed to depoliticize it from

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<sup>40</sup> See Bostock and Jones, *Planning and Power in Iran: Ebtehaj and Economic Development under the Shah*, pp. 111-122. Ladjvardi, "Abolhassan Ebtehaj."

<sup>41</sup> Baldwin, *Planning and Development in Iran*, p. 4.

Mohamad Reza Shah, who appointed Ebtehaj as the head of the PO with the consent of the United States. But Mohamad Reza Shah kept Ebtehaj in his post as long as Ebtehaj went along with the Shah's insistence on increasing the military budget even during economic crisis.<sup>42</sup>

During the 1950s, Ebtehaj, was deeply influenced by Walt Rostow's concept of staged development. Rostow believed that economic growth, vis-à-vis various developmental projects, would automatically lead to a higher living standard and change the sociopolitical consciousness of the people. According to Dr. Khodadad Farmanfarmaian, a close associate of Ebtehaj and the head of the Harvard Advisory Group, Ebtehaj believed:

Once you raise the standard of living of people through deliberate economic development, all these political problems—corruptions, inefficiency, jealousies, etcetera . . . will be wiped out from their awareness, from their conscious, from their character if you will. And as the standard of living went up, people would become more straightforward, more cooperative, and that you would get true social, political change from the development of the development of the country.<sup>43</sup>

Ebtehaj's liberal prescription for economic development was a typical representation of what Foucault called "a regime of truth," which the U.S. epistemic community represented as a universal developmental model for everywhere. Its basic tenets were simple: (a) increase private consumption and expenditure, (b) decrease tariffs on imports, (c) export products that are comparatively profitable, and (d) encourage investment by increasing capital security and profitability. From 1952 to 1962, Iran received more than \$1.135 billion from the United States out of which \$225 million was in loans, \$504 million was for military assistance, and the

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<sup>42</sup> Bostock and Jones, *Planning and Power in Iran: Ebtehaj and Economic Development under the Shah*, pp. 151-154.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 92. Habib Ladjvardi, "Interview with Khordad Farmanfarmaian " in *Iranian Oral History Project / Harvard University Center for Middle Eastern Studies* (Iranian Oral History Project | Harvard University Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1982 ), tape 3.



remainder was for various economic programs. This aid, combined with increasing oil revenues and other income, produced a sum of \$3.407 billion from 1955 to 1962.<sup>44</sup>

With this impressive amount to spend on private and public expenditures, and combined with lowering tariffs, which Prime Minister Munucheher Iqbal (1956-1960) called the “Open Door Policy,” the country was flooded with consumer goods.

Ali Ansari quoted Elwell-Sutton’s description of Iran in 1957:

Financially, Persia is heavily and irrevocably indebted to the United States. Large American missions of officers and men advise the Armed Forces and the police. American advisers are attached to every ministry and American World bank officials watch carefully over the activities of the Plan Organization. All the international agencies are at work, and semi-official concerns like the Near East Foundation add their quota. More than 100 American officials work in the huge new Point-Four building in Tehran. . . . Americans have reorganized the educational system. American cars, cosmetics and refrigerators fill the shops. . . . Even the Seventh Day Adventists have opened a large church in a fashionable quarter of Tehran.<sup>45</sup>

By 1960, this so-called “Open Door Policy” drastically increased cheap imports and decreased non-oil exports as expected, but the policy also destroyed the local economy that provided subsistence living for the largest portion of the population. This portion of the economy was not taken into account. As a result, while the open market policy caused a severe shortage of balance-of-trade and balance-of-payment, it also created unemployment and under-employment out of a portion of the self-sufficient portion of the population.<sup>46</sup> These policies were in sharp contrast to Mussadiq’s era when the country had achieved a balance of payment with a non-oil economy. A serious attempt was made to improve the efficiency of the traditional economy without destroying it.

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<sup>44</sup> Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979*, pp. 204-211.

<sup>45</sup> Ali M. Ansari, *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Next Great Crisis in the Middle East* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), p. 41.

<sup>46</sup> Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979*, p. 201.

While the traditional economy was on the verge of collapse, the “landed property became even stronger than it had ever been since 1921.”<sup>47</sup> In 1955, Mussadiq’s 1953 land tax reform, which had imposed a 20% tax on absentee landholders, half of which to be allocated as income subsidized for peasants and the other half for rural development, was reduced to 7.5%.<sup>48</sup> With Mussadiq out of the way, as Mohamad Reza Shah rescinded land-tax, he began to sell some of his own land his father had coercively acquired. Mussadiq had charged that stolen property could not be sold legally, and worse yet, be represented as a cheap land reform.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, Mohamad Reza Shah did both—rescinded the land tax and sold his own property to cultivating farmers. In short, the pursuit of open door policies did not liberalize the economy or politics because of the shah-centered political rationality in Iran.

### **Representing Shah-centered Development**

In contrast to the presupposition of liberal economic models of the 1950s, which assumed free competition among multiple actors, the state official discourse represented development as a shah-centered state model. Accordingly, Mohamad Reza Shah was valued as the necessary strongman needed to act as the guide, the arbiter, and the interpreter for economic development. The state-elites reproduced this image of Mohamad Reza Shah as each went along with this narrative of the necessary evil of a strongman.<sup>50</sup> In a revealing description of how Mohamad

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Keddie and Richard, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, p. 139, foot note 134

<sup>49</sup> Mohammed Reza, *Mission for My Country*, pp. 323-324.

<sup>50</sup> Notwithstanding their differences, the common theme among personalities involved with Mohammad Reza Shah’s regime is their consensus on the centrality of the role of the shah in all aspects of decision-making. See Iranian Oral History at Harvard University @ <http://ted.lib.harvard.edu/ted/deliver/home>. The exemplary case of how the state-elites in Iran believed in a shah-centered state is Assadollah Alam’s memoir, see Alikhani, ed., *The Complete Notes of Assaddollah Alam (Yad Dasht-Haay-E Alam)*.

Reza Shah found himself as the source of guidance, he described how he chaired the Council of Ministers in three successive occasions:

I never use gavel, but control things merely by the look in my eyes and by my facial expression and tone and voice. . . . I explained the great importance of a documentary film for informing the people of the progress on our developmental programme. . . . I expressed the guiding consideration for the allocation of oil revenues for our developmental programme. . . . I gave instructions on guiding the production of tea and sugar.<sup>51</sup>

In describing his duty in these three meetings, he used the word “I” 27 times to refer to himself as the direct or indirect source of authority. In other words, although the state adopted liberal economic models, it practiced them according to a shah-centered political rationality in which Mohamad Reza Shah commanded the macro-economic policies and his trustees executed his directives.

This shah-guided economic rationality was neither a liberal concept nor a concept previously constructed in the discourse of modern absolutism by Reza Shah. The policies were a blend of both. This economic rationality was liberal because it opened up the domestic market to foreign imports and investment, it deregulated currency exchange, and it maintained a relatively high currency value. It was illiberal because the state extracted and spent most of the available resources and ended up possessing the largest portion of the means of production and distribution.

This illiberal liberalism was in contrast to Reza Shah’s economic planning when the state strictly regulated import, export, and currency exchange through numerous state monopolies. These monopolies included primary agricultural products, such as wheat and barley, the main food staple at the time. In other words, Reza Shah had followed a protectionist policy, which essentially subsidized the industrialization—on the backs of the peasants—of Tehran and a few

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<sup>51</sup> Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979*, pp. 75-137.

major cities where most state-owned factories were located.<sup>52</sup> In contrast, Mohamad Reza Shah, the son, opened up domestic and local industry. Nevertheless, both the father and son pushed a state-centered economic development. For example, Mohammad Reza Shah wrote: “In modernizing a nation, just as in conducting a military campaign, you need a plan of action,” which meant a plan of action by Mohamad Reza Shah.<sup>53</sup> This representation of economic development was contrary to the liberal view of American economists on the state payroll. Alluding to economists who disfavored Mohamad Reza Shah-centered developmental policies, Mohamad Reza Shah retorted:

Some American and European economists and engineers have peculiar ideas on how we should go about Westernizing an economically less-developed country [Iran]. . . . I profoundly disagree. . . . Because of the shortage of technicians and managers and because private investors were timid about entering the industrial field, the Government had to do much of the pioneering. This was true in my father’s time, and in some fields, it is still the case today. . . . The Government owns and operates industrial enterprises in many parts of the country now.<sup>54</sup>

Mohamad Reza Shah, however, was not alone in his resentment of economists because the state paid to receive their advice. For example, Ebtehaj’s resentment of American and European economists was similar to that of Mohamad Reza Shah. In response to warning issued by economists at the World Bank, Ebtehaj said:

The way to develop a country is not to listen to economists, who always say, “No, don’t do this, don’t do anything.” If America in her early years had economists she would never have developed. . . . If a patient will surely die unless he has a serious operation, and he might not survive the operation, is there any sensible person who would say: “Don’t operate”? That is Iran’s position.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Mohammed Reza, *Mission for My Country*, p. 138.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 133-155.

<sup>54</sup> Bostock and Jones, *Planning and Power in Iran: Ebtehaj and Economic Development under the Shah*, p. 115.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 153-160.

In other words, the state-elites valued a shah-centered state political economy, which had its own rule of measuring economic development. The logic of these rules, however, was based on the official state discourse. That is why economic policies were liberal in some sense and illiberal in others.

### **Measuring Economic Development**

As in any political economy, the metrics for measuring economic gains and losses are embedded in the political discourse that constitutes not only what is considered “interests” or “goals” of the game, but also the rules by which those goals or interests are measured. In this shah-centered political economy, the metrics for measuring what was considered developmental goals and how the players interacted to achieve them rested, on the one hand, the relationship between Mohamad Reza Shah and the state, and on the other hand, the relationship between the shah-centered state and the elites. In other words, the mode of rationality between the state and the state-elites followed a particular logic that was inherent in the particularity of their relations, a logic by which the state-elites understood their developmental goals and competed with one another to achieve them.

In this relational logic, since the state and Mohamad Reza Shah had become one and the same as the shah set the rules of the game in which state-elites competed and picked the losers and winners. For example, Ebtehaj believed that oil revenues should be appropriated only to developmental projects and be maintained under the control of the Plan Organization (PO), a position that liberal international institutions supported. But various ministries competed to keep oil revenues in the general budget. Meanwhile, Mohamad Reza Shah prioritized military spending over other developmental projects. In this competition for resources, Mohamad Reza Shah’s priority set the goals among the state-elites. In 1959, when Ebtehaj requested to have budgetary autonomy for the PO, as it was originally designed, he also expressed his displeasure

with increasing military spending at a time of worsening economic crisis. Mohamad Reza Shah had him arrested, and had it not been for Ebtehaj's support by the U.S. government, perhaps his stay in prison would have been longer than a few weeks.<sup>56</sup> If one were to believe Mohamad Reza Shah's own rhetoric of balancing the state's security needs with the developmental needs, then he should have followed Ebtehaj's suggestion.<sup>57</sup> However, Mohamad Reza Shah made up his own rules, and the state-elites rushed to glorify whatever decision he made—good or bad.

Moreover, the logic of this game dictated the behavior of the state-elites. As such, the state-elites competed to please and glorify Mohamad Reza Shah, and developmental projects were means to achieve their goals. Based on this relational logic, while the state-elites valued projects that looked impressive, required big investment, and produced fast results, they ignored projects that brought no glory to Mohamad Reza Shah and thus to them. As a result, grand and showy projects were valued, but badly needed downstream factories and numerous infrastructural missing links, which required many small investments and could have produced sustainable development, had no advocate.<sup>58</sup> For example, in regard to improving water resources, Nikki R. Keddie, a respected historian of Iran, first alluded to Mohamad Reza Shah egomania and the corruptive competition among elites. She argued:

Most dams have been poorly planned and wastefully expensive; more seriously, the stress has been overwhelmingly on the dams themselves, which are showy and spectacular, and on power generation. Often the subordinate local irrigation systems, without which the dams serve no agricultural purpose, were not built for years, if ever, nor have the areas

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>57</sup> For examples of liberal rhetoric professed by Mohamad Reza Shah, see his writings previously cited. For information on Ebtehaj's assessment of the situation, see Amjad, *Iran: From Royal Dictatorship to Theocracy*, p. 66. Ladjevardi, ed., *Memoris of Jafar Sharif-Emami; Prime Minister of Iran (1960-61 & 1978)*. For an example of how various ministers tried to convince Mohamad Reza Shah, see Keddie and Richard, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, p. 128.

<sup>58</sup> The literature on Iran, in most part, refers to Mohamad Rezs Shah's focus on grand projects as a case of egomania, and invidious competition among the state-elites as a case of political corruption, but the logic of these behaviors is constitutive of the shah-centered political discourse of monarchic modernism.

been adequately studied to see if the planned types of irrigation and field allotment are suitable to the region.<sup>59</sup>

In the same vein, George Baldwin, who was a part of the economic advisory committee in the PO, pointed out that the state's pitfalls in designing a steel and petrochemical company were that the state invested money for industry, which had a narrow market limited to Iran—but they were showy. Even in education, Baldwin argued that the state's large investment in educational system, which produced mostly diplomas or certificates while ignoring the practical needs of the economy, was essentially showy and useless.<sup>60</sup>

While water dams, industrial projects, and educational systems were grand, showy, and unproductive, urban planning or lack thereof destroyed the traditional means of production, distribution, and lifestyle. Urban development, which is a misnomer for what happened in Iran, valued the showy cases, for example, of building five-star hotels or a modern airport, but ignored the basic infrastructural needs of its rapid unplanned urbanization. In major cities, urban industrialization destroyed surrounding farms and gardens that traditionally had supplied seasonal vegetables and fruits for their respective urban populations. The conversion of suburbia into industrial zones was done to build industrial parks—but without adequate roads and other infrastructural supports. These policies changed the once beautiful suburbia of major cities into barren, over-populated, and polluted places where millions of rural migrants came to build and live. The unplanned migration to industrial zones turned into industrial parks into mixed commercial and residential zones. Even in today's Tehran, one routinely sees a polluting factory near homes, offices, schools, and hospitals. To make the situation worse, on the periphery of these “industrial zones,” even poorer migrant workers built shantytowns. Tehran became a

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<sup>59</sup> Baldwin, *Planning and Development in Iran*.

<sup>60</sup> Sayed Mohsen Habibi, *Intellectual Trends in the Contemporary Iranian Architecture and Urbanism (1979-2003)* (Tehran: Cultural Research Bureau 2005/1384), pp. 9-19.

showcase of this ugly, inefficient, and unhealthy urbanization. In response to this urbanization, the Ministry of Urban and Housing Development was formed. However, the ministry was also embedded in the same relational logic which promoted grand and showy projects—but ignored the basic needs of the city. In brief, Tehran, which was the focal point of economic development, represented a model case of a grand and showy developmental project with unintended consequences that continue to make the city an exemplary case of planning or lack of planning.<sup>61</sup>

Ironically, Mohamad Reza Shah romanticized this unplanned planning. He represented a lingering beauty of the past mixed with the progressive move toward the future, a future that has not yet arrived in Tehran. In 1960, he wrote:

Today my country is a show window for the blend of ancient and modern. . . . Just outside of Tehran, you can still see camel caravans go by, bringing goods from afar into the city. (Lucky is he who can see a caravan and hear its camel bells, as it passes under a full moon). . . . [In contrast,] as you go to meet a friend at Tehran's big new jet-age international airport, you pass along broad boulevards lined with modern shops, and ablaze with neon lights, where some of the women will be wearing the most daring Paris fashions, and others still be veiled.<sup>62</sup>

The shah's romanticization of these visibly sharp contrasts in Tehran was, however, an interpretation that could have possibly amused a foreign tourist of Iran, and not an Iranian living in it. At the time, socialists, nationalists, and Islamists were particularly not amused by these contrasts. They respectively represented these contrasts as class inequality between those who lived in northern Tehran and those who lived in shantytowns. Nationalists represented these contrasts as the sign of foreign domination and exploitation of Iranian dignity. Islamists represented these contrasts as the promotion of un-Islamic mores by the state. Most of these

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<sup>61</sup> For an example of how the discourse of modernization affected the planning or lack of planning major cities in Iran, see Mohammed Reza, *Mission for My Country*, p. 28.

<sup>62</sup> Zamani, *Jalal Al-E Ahmad's Culture* p. 70



discontents expressed themselves in literary works, poems, essays, parodies, and short stories.

For example, Jalal Al-e Ahmad, a famous essayist, wrote:

In the past, our architects worked with . . . local materials that they knew well and shaped according to the existing human conditions and needs of the time. With those materials, they made, shaped, and built inspiring structures that exceeded anyone's individual ability but reflected our human conditions in its continuity.

Centuries later, the magnificence of these standing structures in cities such as . . . still inspire us, because they embody our spirits in time. In them, we see the genesis of our presence and the significance of our eternity. They are the embodiment of our souls, and that is their significance.

Nowadays however, the imported materials shape the inferior stricken minds of our architects and engineers. . . . They build apartments similar to chambers of a beehive; these holes confine the body, but more importantly dominate the human soul. . . . The same goes for our dams and high-rises. These structures are designed to dominate the human soul and break our continuity with the past, and that is their significance [domination of the West].<sup>63</sup>

Because SAVAK focused on censoring texts that directly criticized Mohamad Reza Shah, it did not comprehend the subversive nature of Al-e Ahmad's rejection of modernity equated with Westernization and modernization. Al-e Ahmad represented Western modernity as a plague striking the soul and minds of Iranians. This was a transformative shift in the language.

In sum, after the coup in 1953, the state seemingly adopted American produced knowledge of economic development, but the state understood and practiced that body of knowledge in accordance with the relational logic that constituted the behavior of Mohamad Reza Shah as the embodiment of the state. Moreover, the state's developmental interests and how the state-elites competed to achieve them were constitutive of the state official discourse.

## **Foreign Relations**

**Representing Relations with Others:** Constitutive of the discourse of monarchic modernism was how friends and foes were classified into a dichotomous world of good versus

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<sup>63</sup> Jalal Al-e Ahmad, "Karnameh-e Seh Saleh," pp. 29-30, Also quoted in, Mohammed Reza, *Answer to History*.

evil, a practice that continued until the fall of the regime when foes and friends juxtaposed their positions. In this discourse, while the West in general, and the United States in particular were represented as trustworthy allies, the Soviet Union was represented as the primary foe.

In this representation, unlike Reza Shah's raced-based rationale, which equated Iranian with Aryans and Germans, Mohammad Reza Shah's logics for his alliance with the United States and his opposition the Soviet Union were based on security. Accordingly, U.S. policies and practices were split into two categories. The "good" part of America included its conservative people, realists, and security-conscious elites. The "bad" part of America consisted of liberal elites whom Mohamad Reza Shah represented as naive, dangerous, and an uninformed minority. In this representation, Mohamad Reza Shah referred to Eisenhower, Nixon, Kissinger, and Johnson as "his old friends." But he implied that Kennedy, Carter, and the other Americans who criticized Iran were misinformed about the reality of Iran and the special bond that existed between the shah and the people. He blamed the liberal-oriented journalists for misinforming Americans. He argued that American liberals inadvertently promoted the cause of international communism by criticizing the security-conscious policy of Mohamad Reza Shah and his conservative allies in the United States.<sup>64</sup> Based on this relational logic in the discourse, the conservative America was to be trusted, and the liberal America was to be suspected with ambiguous motives.<sup>65</sup>

In the discourse, the Soviet Union was also dichotomized—good and bad. The "good" part of the Soviet Union was its Russian people, and its "bad" part was its state. Iran represented the Soviet state as an evil entity that threatened the lives and freedom of the Russians as well as the

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<sup>64</sup> For example, see Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> ———, *Mission for My Country*, p. 306.

Iranians. Mohamad Reza Shah repeatedly represented Russians in an oppositional relation with their own state. He wrote:

I have the kindest regard for the Russian people as whole. The ordinary citizens of Russia realize better than do their leaders that no freedom-loving country [referring to Iranian people] can accept aid from a regime that shows clear signs of wanting to dictate its neighbors' foreign policy.<sup>66</sup>

In other words, the people of Iran and Russia naturally shared a certain value, but the Soviet state violated that value. Based on this relational logic in the discourse, Mohamad Reza Shah represented the Soviet state as a threat to freedom of people in not only Iran, but also the West. In other words, discursively, Mohamad Reza Shah had become the defender of the Western freedom and democracy, although his own polity was not similar to any Western democracy.

Accordingly, in 1955, the state enthusiastically entered into a U.S.-British-backed security agreement named the Baghdad Pact, which had a similar logic with that of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The Baghdad Pact was a security pact among Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, and Iraq against the Soviet Union. However, Mohamad Reza Shah tried to maintain a cordial relation with the Soviet Union. In 1956, following this policy, the shah visited Moscow and began to negotiate a non-aggression pact between Iran and the Soviet Union. However, the 1958 military coup in Iraq, which dethroned the British-backed king Abul-lah, along with a foiled military coup in Iran, provoked the shah to enter into a mutual defense pact agreement with the United States. The Baghdad Pact was revised (a) to first reflect the absence of Iraq and (b) to strengthen the shah's regime. The Baghdad Pact was, therefore, renamed the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). With CENTO in full force. Mohamad Reza Shah's regime and

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<sup>66</sup> Habib Ladjevardi, "Shahpour Bakhtiyar," (Iranian Oral History Project, Harvard University Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1984).

its conduct became even more entangled with U.S. policies. For contending discourses, however, entering a security agreement with the United States was interpreted as the relinquishing of Iran's sovereignty to the United States.<sup>67</sup>

However, in the official discourse, the state represented and understood itself as an equal partner with the West, receiving economic aid, loans, grants, and advice from the United States, all of which were represented as economic interdependence in contrast to Mussadiq's policy of economic isolation. Moreover, Iran's security pact with the United States was represented as exercising balance of power against the threat of the Soviet Union, as opposed to Mussadiq's policy of non-alignment, which supposedly prepared the way for a communist takeover.

According to this relational logic, Mussadiq's policy was labeled as "negative nationalism" in contrast to what Mohamad Reza Shah labeled as "positive nationalism." Mohamad Reza Shah wrote:

When Mossadegh and his followers cried like women and indulged in hysterical tirades against the British, . . . I tried to think of the larger national interest. . . . Mossadeqh's negative nationalism not only provided the Communists with their ideal opportunity but, paradoxically, allowed the British more influence over Iran's national policies than ever before. . . . Mossadegh's policy was of course one of negativism, not nationalism in any valid sense; nevertheless, the term positive nationalism I think helps distinguish between his conduct and that of the true patriot.<sup>68</sup>

In this text, the state official nationalism is represented as positive, logical, anti-communist, and patriotic. In contrast, Mussadiq's nationalism is represented as the opposite. Simultaneously, Mohamad Reza Shah argued that "British imperialism has ceased in Iran . . . and outmoded capitalistic imperialist exploitation . . . is giving way to new co-operative relationships."<sup>69</sup> Based on this relational logic, Mohamad Reza Shah argued:

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<sup>67</sup> For example, see Mohammed Reza, *Mission for My Country*, p. 126. The difference in spelling in the original.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

Just as a man has some friends upon whom he would especially rely on in any crisis, so too have we. We remain always ready to enlarge the circle of those most entrusted; at the same time we remain vigilant to join with our friends in resisting any form of imperialism.<sup>70</sup>

In other words, while the state constructed friends out of the conservative America, it made foes out of the Soviet Union. In this relational logic, the state represented U.S. economic and security dependence as a natural outcome of an alliance among friends and against their common foes. Meanwhile, contending discourses represented U.S.-Iran relations as a loss of Iran's sovereignty. In other words, in the context of contending discourses in Iran, U.S.-Iran relations became attached to a different narrative that was associated with the 1953 coup, British colonialism, and then U.S. imperialism. But for Mohamad Reza Shah, both the United States and Britain were associated with words such as "trust," "friendship," "alliance," and "cooperation." However, Mohamad Reza Shah's representation of the United States as a friendly ally began to change during Kennedy's presidential campaign in 1960.

## **Part II: Crisis and Reform (1960-1964)**

### **Representing Economic Underdevelopment as Security**

In 1961, as power shifted in Washington under the rubric of the "Progress for Alliance," the Kennedy administration shifted its foreign policy focus from military assistance to economic development. Kennedy argued that underdevelopment provides conditions conducive for a revolution. Peaceful economic and political development was, therefore, necessary to secure freedom and stop communism. Kennedy warned, "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable."<sup>71</sup> As such, revolutions were classified into "peaceful" or "good" ones and "violent" or "bad" ones. While liberal revolutions were

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<sup>70</sup> Joseph Grunwald, "The Alliance for Progress," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science: Economic and Political Trends in Latin America* 27, no. 4 (1964).

<sup>71</sup> Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations*.

represented as good, peaceful, and democratic, communist revolutions were represented as the opposite. This was, however, a shift in the logic of security from the Eisenhower era to the Kennedy era. Following the policy of containment in Iran, Eisenhower emphasized building Mohamad Reza Shah's military as the bulwark against communism, but Kennedy focused on economic development and political reform as the way to contain the spread of communism.

As expected, when Kennedy became president in January 1961, a shift occurred in U.S. policy in Iran. Phillip Talbot, the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, suggested the following U.S. plan: (a) push for a land reform, (b) decrease its military assistance, (3) increase economic assistance, and (d) push for political reform without endangering Mohamad Reza Shah's system.<sup>72</sup> Finally, Talbot recommended Ali Amini, the then-Iranian Ambassador to the United States, to head a reformist government.

Despite his initial resistance, Mohamad Reza Shah appointed Amini as a "reformist premier." Once in power, Amini set out to reform the system along the lines that Talbot had outlined. Notwithstanding differences in nuance with Mohamad Reza Shah, Amini identified with the official state discourse rather than contending discourses. For socialists, nationalists, and Islamists, Amini was an American stooge who had negotiated the Iran-Britain oil dispute on behalf of the coup makers.<sup>73</sup> In Amini's view, the leaders of the opposition were not "realistic." Thus, Amini did not, in any measurable way, try to co-opt the opposition into the government.

Amini's reform was, however, more focused on economic and political reform, but not fundamental changes. Amini's policies were, however, compatible with the Kennedy's foreign policy articulated in the Alliance for Progress, which showcased economic and political reform

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<sup>72</sup> Keddie and Richard, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, pp. 143-144.

<sup>73</sup> For the dispute settlement, see Ladjevardi, "Shahpour Bakhtiyar." For an example of how Amini Nationalists depicted Amini, see, Ladjevardi, ed., *Memoirs of Ali Amini: Prime Minister of Iran (1961-62)*.

as a way of preventing the spread of communism. In other words, with the aim of securing Iran from the “threat” of its own people, Amini went to work to implement Kennedy’s plan of making economic and political reform as the gateway for improving the conditions of life and thus preventing the spread of communism. Amini did not, however, aim to fundamentally reform the system by co-opting the opposition. He like other state-elites, considered the opposition as dangerous to the system. He, therefore, started a technocratic approach to economic and political reform.

Amini tried to restore the power of the premiership by shifting power away from the court to the cabinet, a move that frightened Mohamad Reza Shah. He removed many of Mohamad Reza Shah’s sycophants from their posts, including dismissing the pro-shah *Majlis*. Instead, he appointed liberal, reformist-minded technocrats to govern. For example, he appointed Hassan Arsanjani, a former Tudeh sympathizer, as the Minister of Agriculture. Arsanjani proposed a land reform strategy that could have potentially broken the power of tribal, aristocratic, military, and clerical landholders. His cabinet also included another former member of the Tudeh Party and National Front as the ministers of Justice and Education. As a trained economist, Amini agreed with the IMF-proposed stabilization plan, which the previous government had agreed to but had failed to implement. The refusal to implement the IMF’s recommendations had resulted in its retaliatory by freezing a badly needed \$35 million in emergency credit. With Amini in power, IMF released the \$35 million emergency credit. Also, the United States issued an \$85 million cash grant to help his government avert default on its foreign payment.<sup>74</sup> As expected, the IMF stabilization plan included recommendations for reducing government expenditure and

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<sup>74</sup> Ladjevardi, ed., *Memoirs of Ali Amini: Prime Minister of Iran (1961-62)*, pp. 125-128. In the language, the people refer to nepotism as having a *party*, which means having a “connection” with an authority in the government. This practice has a legacy of the traditional form of governance that was familial, local, and consensual for the most part.

fighting corruption. Subsequently, Amini cut 15% of the budget for various ministries, but he could not cut the military budget, which made up the largest portion of the budget.<sup>75</sup>

Amini's reform plan also called for fighting bureaucratic and commercial corruption. To deal with bureaucratic corruption, he enforced a tough disciplinary regime on mid-level bureaucrats and attempted to stop the rampant nepotism, which was a normal way of doing business in Iran.<sup>76</sup>

This policy further alienated the state-elites who treated governmental institutions as their private property. To deal with high prices, he blamed the traditional merchants (*Bazaaris*) for hoarding goods and he prosecuted some of them. However, these policies alienated the court, the landed elites, the bureaucracy, the *Bazaaris*, and the conservative clergy.

Meanwhile, the rhetoric of democratic reform heard from both the United States and Amini energized the opposition to regroup and call for democratizing the existing system. Mussadiq's secular loyalists, who had maintained their support among the general population, including university students, began to reactivate the Second National Front (SNF). On the other hand, Mussadiq's religious sector formed the "National Freedom Movement." Moreover, the Third Force, which had social democratic tendencies with a strong support among intellectuals—along with a new generation of the Tudeh Party, began to campaign for democratic reform. Confident of their popularity, the opposition was called for a new election, but Amini refused to hold one. He was confident that a new election would bring the Second National Front to power, and this appeared intolerable for Amini as well as Mohamad Reza Shah. In his interview with Habib Ladjervarid, Amini contended:

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<sup>75</sup> Helmut Richards, "America's Shah Shahanshah's Iran," *Middle East Research and Information Project* 40, no. Sep. (1975): p. 16.

<sup>76</sup> Ladjervardi, ed., *Memoirs of Ali Amini: Prime Minister of Iran (1961-62)*, pp. 123-124.



The people still do not understand the very meaning of freedom or its limitation. This cannot continue. . . . We must first tell the people you are only free to do things within a certain boundary; gradually, we can expand that boundary. . . . Beyond that boundary, they must censor themselves. This means that journalists . . . could ask about foreign policy . . . but before they write . . . they must also ask us, should we write this or not, is this in our national interest or not, after all, this is how it is in every free country in the world. . . . And this is the only way to manage the country. . . . You ask about election! . . . But everyone knows that as soon as I begin one, every province will be in chaos. . . . At this point in time, our priority is economic conditions.<sup>77</sup>

In this text, Amini sounds just like the shah. Additionally, discursively, the relationship between the state and the people is very clear. The state is responsible for demarcating and teaching freedom; the people have the duty to follow it. Moreover, the relational linkage between economic and political development is also clear. Similar to the official state discourse, Amini favors economic over political development. In this interview, Amini blamed Mohamad Reza Shah for not allowing a free election, but a comparative analysis of Amini's text at the time reveals that more often than not he sided with the Shah. Thus, his quarrel with the Shah was over the differences of style, personalities, and positions in the state, but not in their embeddedness in the official state discourse. For example, similar to the state's "official civil society," which consisted of paid hooligans participating in pro-state demonstration or attacking anti-state protests, he states that the National Front leaders were too inexperienced to realize that *our people* and SAVAK agents constituted a large portion of their protestors. Regardless of the trustworthiness of this statement, the utterances of such statements, which occurred often, meant that the state not only demarcated the meaning of freedom, but also the meaning of the people, civil society, and political participation. For Amini, the people meant those who worked for the state, and their people meant the rest of Iranians.

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<sup>77</sup> Yari, *The Iran Party According to the Documents*.

Obviously, Amini's words were not able to permeate the values, concepts, and images embedded in the language of contending discourses, and they were not able to attach a new narrative to the people's existential economic and political experiences. Although the Amini-Kennedy rhetoric of reform provided a breathing pause of hope, they failed to reconstitute their reality in any measurable way. In other words, as Amini alienated some of the state-elites, he pushed the opposition even further away. His policies ended up helping the shah's consolidation of power as SAVAK agents actively pursued discrediting Amini's government between both state-elites and before the opposition.<sup>78</sup>

By 1962, the clerical establishment led by Ayatollah Khomeini considered Amini's reforms as another American-Western conspiracy "to enslave Iran."<sup>79</sup> The merchant class did not like Amini for his anti-corruption campaign, which unfairly targeted the Bazaaris.<sup>80</sup> The opposition did not like Amini because he actually repressed their leader more than previous governments did. For example, Amini's government lasted fifteen months, and Shahpour Bakhtiyar, the leader of the Second National Front spent eleven months of that time period under arrest. Nevertheless, the most potent threat to Amini's government was the combination of the shah, the military elites, and the SAVAK.

On January 21, 1962, in a peaceful demonstration, students at the University of Teheran demanded free parliamentary election, which was the main slogan of the National Front. Despite the repeated call for leadership, students began to chant, "Long live Mussadiq, death to Amini,

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<sup>78</sup> Ali M. Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921: The Pahlavis and After* (London; New York: Longman, 2003), pp. 153-155.

<sup>79</sup> Ladjevardi, ed., *Memoirs of Ali Amini: Prime Minister of Iran (1961-62)*.

<sup>80</sup> See, Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 423.

and death to the shah.”<sup>81</sup> The protest provided an ideal opportunity for Mohamad Reza Shah to discredit Amini, raise the threat of a communist revolution, and push back Kennedy’s reform.

The next day the military brutally attacked the university. Ahmad Farhad, the university chancellor, resigned in protest. In his letter of resignation to Amini, Dr. Farhad wrote:

Many of the students have been beaten to the point of death. I have never seen or heard of so much cruelty, sadism, atrocity, and vandalism on the part of Government forces. Some of the girls of the University were criminally attacked in the classrooms by the soldiers. . . . Not even the University Hospital was out of bounds to the soldiers. Many of the nurses and patients were either beaten or wounded.<sup>82</sup>

Turning a peaceful demonstration into a bloody war on students achieved its purpose. The military closed the university and began a massive round of arrests. The SAVAK arrested and charged leaders of the opposition with the usual charge of disturbing the peace and threatening the state’s security.<sup>83</sup> Meanwhile, Amini was stuck in a budget crisis, which needed more help from the United States or a cut in the military expenditure, neither one of which was forthcoming. In June 1962, Amini turned in his resignation and the shah appointed Assadullah Alam, one of his most loyal sycophants, as the new prime minister.

In short, in the battle to break the shah-centered state, the Kennedy-Amini alliance lost to Mohamad Reza Shah. Both Kennedy and Amini returned to their default positions, which was supporting the shah rather than jeopardizing the system. In his offer of resignation, Amini said to the shah:

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<sup>81</sup> Richards, "America's Shah Shahanshah's Iran," p. 16.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> It is argued that the head of SAVAK, Timour Bakhtiyar, who wished to replace Amini as the prime minister, instigated the attack on the University of Tehran. For example, see Ladjevardi, ed., *Memoirs of Ali Amini: Prime Minister of Iran (1961-62)*, p. 123.

I want to leave before you kick me out. Unfortunately, this is the reality of this country, the shah is the center of stability. Governments can come and go, but the people always want to rely on a center of stability.”<sup>84</sup>

Hence, he did not want to rock the boat, and in a Machiavellian approach, Amini insisted:

The shah must remain above politics to maintain an air of divinity. After all, it is understood that the shah is indeed the shadow of God, to maintain this idea, one should treat the shah with ceremonial protocol instead of treating him as disposable napkins . . . rather than him being everywhere and used for anything.”<sup>85</sup>

Put differently, Amini’s differences with the shah were not about meaningful political reform. They were about how to stabilize the system to prevent the possibility of a communist revolution. Kennedy concurred and the shah remained the default player in the U.S. policy on Iran. With Amini unable to break the monopoly of the shah’s power, Kennedy tried to push his “reform” by the shah, a policy that consolidated the power of the shah instead of reforming it.

### **Representing a Shah-centered Reform and Revolution**

Although the Kennedy-Amini reform failed to achieve its goals, the rhetoric of peaceful revolution, economic reform, and political development permeated the discourse of monarchic modernism. The shah began to re-articulate the same representation by re-labeling Kennedy’s rhetoric of peaceful revolution as the “White Revolution,” that was supposed to restructure the economy and reform the political system. In a rigged referendum, the shah helped pass a six-point reform bill with 99.8% of the people supposedly voting for it. The shah referred to this performative act of reform as “the revolution of the shah and the people.”<sup>86</sup> From then on, the state represented itself as a revolutionary and reformist government.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>85</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 424.

<sup>86</sup> For voting percentages, see Mohammed Reza, *Answer to History*, pp. 101-129, Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921: The Pahlavis and After*. For democracy as the shah saw it, see, Richards, “America’s Shah Shahanshah’s Iran,” p. 22.

The word “revolution,” which the shah had previously devalued and detested, was suddenly valued. Previously, socialists and democratic nationalists had represented the shah as an anti-revolutionary force and a vestige of a dying feudal system. In contrast, the shah had represented communists as revolutionary forces out to destroy Iran’s heritage of monarchism that had supposedly helped the nation survive its historical ordeals. In other words, in the official state discourse, revolution was devalued as the language of Others, and when Kennedy had referred to the “Alliance for Progress” as a revolution, it had disturbed Mohamad Reza Shah.

In a 1962 interview with Mohamad Reza Shah, David Lilienthal wrote:

The Shah reiterated his bewilderment at some of the campaign speeches about “furthering revolution” and “such things.” [In that interview, the shah said], “I was concerned that the President [Kennedy] was surrounded by some men who were professors and might not be realistic about what revolution means out here, about how evil subversion by the Soviets can be.”<sup>87</sup>

To which Lilienthal responded, “These expressions about ‘revolution’ did not mean in America what they might mean when used in Iran.”<sup>88</sup> In another section of the interview, Lilienthal assured the shah that Kennedy’s use of the word “revolution” had actually meant “social revolution toward higher living standards.”<sup>89</sup> Additionally, Julius C. Holmes, Kennedy’s Ambassador to Iran (1961-1965) recalled that he had to assure Mohamad Reza Shah that Kennedy’s references to “revolutions” in his speeches meant only “social revolutions.”<sup>90</sup>

In the shah’s language, the word “revolution” was considered as the language of the Others. Moreover, in the official state language, words such as “feudalism,” “land reform,” “class justice,” “workers’ rights,” “women’s rights,” “profit sharing,” “health rights,”

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<sup>87</sup> Richards, “America’s Shah Shahanshah’s Iran.”

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Mohammed Reza, *Answer to History*.

“education’s rights,” and “Islamic nationalism” were assumed as the inflammatory language of contending discourses. Suddenly, however, the Shah began to incorporate the same words as if he had invented them.

In 1963, the shah introduced a bill focused on six points: (a) land reform, (b) nationalization of forests and pasturelands, (c) workers’ profit sharing in privately owned factories, (d) privatization of state factories, (e) women’s suffrage, and (f) rural education by conscripted Literacy Corps. This bill had hitherto been a part of the articulatory practices and social demands of various contending discourses. However, the shah began to represent these ideas in by incorporating signifiers, which had become meaningful in the contending discourses against the shah-centered state—people, class-equality, Islam.

First, the state held a referendum which was represented a democratic way of the people to revolt against their oppressors and remain in support of their protector—Mohamad Reza Shah. Previously, the Shah had either rigged elections or refrained from holding them, so this was another shift in representing a shah-led referendum as democratic participation. However, the language of the referendum had belonged to Mussadiq’s discourse of democratic nationalism.

Second, the state represented land reform as a shah-led modernization plan. However, the language of land reform, profit sharing, universal education, universal suffrage, and nationalization were values constructed in the discourse of socialists. For example, since the 1940s, the communist Tudeh Party had promoted peasant rights to profit from the land they worked on, workers’ rights to own the surplus value (profit) they produced in privately owned factories, people’s rights to universal education, and women’s right to vote. But while socialists articulated these rights in terms of a historical struggle for a revolutionary overthrowing of the

state, Mohamad Reza Shah rearticulated them as the new *raison d'être* for a divine mission bestowed upon him.

Third, by appealing to *Qur'anic* texts, Mohamad Reza Shah was representing land reform, a profit sharing plan, and nationalization as if they were sanctioned by Islamic texts.<sup>91</sup> In the manifesto for the White Revolution, which became a part of the high school curriculum, Mohamad Reza Shah wrote:

It is obvious that I have enjoyed *God's merciful blessing* in this endeavor because this was a *revolution* that was based on the principles of *justice and human equality* in accordance with the most virtuous Islamic teaching. Naturally, in this endeavor, I had *God's divine approval*, and certainly this revolution has been in accordance with . . . principles and ideals inherent in the *Iranian civilization* for many millennia.<sup>92</sup>

In this text, Mohammed Reza Shah invoked the Islamic-monarchic language of divine sovereignty to re-represent “the principle of justice and human equality,” although with a different interpretation from pre-modern texts.<sup>93</sup> For centuries, in the Islamic-monarchic discourse, the concept of divine sovereignty had been linked to providing physical security and thus establishing peace and justice, but the concept of human equality was linked to equality before God. Justice was about providing physical security, and equality among men or by men did not exist in the discourse. In Mohammed Reza Shah’s manifesto, however, the repeated references to the principle of justice and human equality were the borrowed language of socialists and nationalists that were retrofitted into the official state language—monarchic modernism. In this representation, Mohammed Reza Shah began to borrow class-justice, human equality, and divine sovereignty and mixed these terms with the language of Islamic and Persian nationalism.

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<sup>91</sup> ———, *White Revolution*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis is added.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

Values and concepts previously constructed in different discourses were now being linked to new and different series of relational linkages, differences, and oppositions. For example, Reza Shah's raced-based Persian Nationalism, which had been constructed in oppositional relation with the Shi'i concept of divine sovereignty, was now being linked to it. This linkage would have been improbable during Reza Shah's reign. Nevertheless, Mohammed Reza Shah represented them as mutually inclusive concepts.<sup>94</sup>

Fourth, by borrowing the intertextual language of Irani-Khareji, which had become a prominent value in the language of democratic nationalists during Mussadiq's oil nationalization struggle, Mohammed Reza Shah classifies his dynasty as the manifestation of a "true" Iranian nationalism in an oppositional relation with foreigners. He declared:

Although Reza Shah had secured the country by establishing a disciplined military, building roads . . . unveiling women, codifying uniform clothing for men, and doing many other important things in the shortest possible time, he never had the opportunity to modernize the social foundation of Iran . . . or uprooting puppets of foreign powers.<sup>95</sup>

Relying on the premise that his father had fought foreigners, Mohammad Reza Shah represents his dynasty as a bulwark against foreigners and his opposition as the puppets of foreigners. Referring to Mussadiq and the Tudeh Party as "foreigners" and "foreign agents," the shah wrote:

Those who pretended to be anti-foreigners were, in fact, according to credible documents and reasons, used to take direct orders from foreigners. . . . [And] the only thing they all shared was their opposition to the Pahlavi's monarchic power . . . [and] they did that by promoting pessimism and suspicion in the nation.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> As was explained in Chapter 5, the official state discourse of modern monarchism created a boundary between "good" and "bad" Muslims. "Good" Muslims were represented as Persian nationalists, but "bad" Muslims were represented as anti-shah, anti-Iran, and fanatics who not only opposed the modernization of Iran, but also misunderstood the "true" teaching of Islam.

<sup>95</sup> Mohammed Reza, *White Revolution*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>96</sup> Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *The Curse of the Land (Nefrin-E Zamin)*, 2 ed. (Tehran: Ravaq, 1357/1978), p. 278.



In this text, Mohamad Reza Shah tried to invert Mussadiq's anti-foreign position. However, the fact that the shah felt compelled to do so is the constructed value of Irani versus *Khareji*, which is intertextually understood as a universal truth. In all contending discourses, foreigners and their agents were a part of the political language, even for a regime like that of Mohammed Reza Shah, which argued against Mussadiq's brand of nationalism for being negative toward foreigners.

According to this relational logic, the state-elites repeated the rhetoric of a shah-centered revolution of the people against foreigners. The official state radio, television, newspapers, and even celebratory state-sponsored functions spread similar messages.<sup>97</sup> Although the state used the language of "Iranians versus foreigners" *ad nauseam*, it did not consider it possible that the people might perceive the increasing presence of Americans in every level of the government as the presence of foreign powers.

Fifth, Mohamad Reza Shah borrowed not only Kennedy's language of social, democratic, and peaceful revolution in his representation of the White Revolution, but also Kennedy's idea of the Peace Corps initiative. The shah's White Revolution included the formation of the Education, Health, and Religion Corps. But there were fundamental differences between Mohamad Reza Shah's corps and Kennedy's Peace Corps. Kennedy's Peace Corps mobilized, organized, and energized idealistic young Americans to voluntarily commit to providing people-to-people developmental, educational, and medical assistance for some of the poorest people in the world. In contrast, the members of the shah's corps did not volunteer for providing their services and most of them resented going to the countryside as much as most country people resented having some strange, inexperienced city dwellers right out of high school telling them how to live their

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<sup>97</sup> For example, the pages of *Ettellaat* and *Keyhan* in this era are filled with references to the state-led reform.

lives. Because of the state-imposed censorship, these resentments were expressed only in alternative media. An example of this resentment reflected in Jalal-e Al Ahmad's book titled *The Curse of the Land*. In a fictional dialogue between an Educational Corps and a local wise man, Al-e Ahmad wrote:

The young man constantly worried about people's lifestyle here. He asked, "Why do they live in mud houses? Why don't they have towels? Why don't they press their clothes? Why do they sleep on bare grounds? Why do they eat with their dirty hands?" . . . I tried to explain to him the ridiculousness of his inquiries. But he would not understand.<sup>98</sup>

Finally, Mohamad Reza Shah represented his revolution as a diplomatic achievement. He boasted that Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon had praised him for his "social," "democratic," and "peaceful" revolution.<sup>99</sup> After Amini's reform failed, even Kennedy's administration gave up its ambition to push for a democratic reform in Iran, and shortly after the transfer of power to Lyndon Johnson, the United States reverted to a shah-centered state policy, a policy that continued until months before the Shah's regime fell in 1979. According to Kenneth Pollack, U.S. officials knew the inadequacy, inefficiencies, and contradictory tenets of the Shah's While Revolution at the time. But after Amini's government proved ineffective, no one cared to push for a substantive reform during the Johnson or Nixon administrations because the Shah was considered a bulwark against the threat of communism.<sup>100</sup> Hence, the United States acquiesced to a shah-centered foreign policy.

As expected, the shah interpreted this acquiescence as having the full backing and trust of the United States. He once bragged:

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<sup>98</sup> Mohammed Reza, *Answer to History*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>99</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, p. 89.

<sup>100</sup> See, Mohammed Reza, *Answer to History*, pp. 16-17.

My friendship with Richard Nixon dates back to 1953 . . . and when he became president . . . we both agreed that a nation must search for alliance with ‘natural allies,’ countries with which it will remain allied by virtue of common and permanent interests.<sup>101</sup>

In sum, in representing a shah-led revolution, the state borrowed the languages of its own contending discourse, as well as Kennedy’s language of social revolution, to communicate with its society and the United States. However, the Shah’s language, policies, and practices of reform convinced successive U.S. administrations that a shah-centered policy was the most “realistic” policy for Iran, but it failed to convince his opposition.<sup>102</sup>

### **Consequences of the White Revolution**

In the same way developmental projects were big, showy, and shah-centered, so was the White Revolution. First, the most important component of the “revolution” was the land reform. Its speedy implementation irreversibly changed the land-tenure rural property relations by eliminating the vestiges of traditional governance at local levels and replacing them with the omnipotent power of the state.<sup>103</sup> From then on, the state became the primary source of distributing credit, land, water, seeds, fertilizer, equipment, and access to markets vis-à-vis government-organized cooperatives.<sup>104</sup> According to Eric Hooglund, who is an authority on land reform in Iran, the reason for land reform was a political decision by the shah to (a) extend the state’s power into rural areas, (b) please the Kennedy administration, and (c) expand his social base.<sup>105</sup> Hooglund argued that while the shah succeeded in his first and second objectives, he

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<sup>101</sup> Richards, "America's Shah Shahanshah's Iran," p. 22.

<sup>102</sup> Mohama Reza Shah spent a large amount of money in the U.S. media and lobbyists to create a positive image for himself. See Helmut Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Land Reform and Social Change in Iran* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), pp. 101-102.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Eric J. Hooglund, *Land and Revolution in Iran, 1960-1980*, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), p. 50.

<sup>105</sup> Richards, "America's Shah Shahanshah's Iran."

failed in the third objective. In other words, the shah lost the support of the landed elites without expanding his social base.<sup>106</sup>

The second controversial component of the White Revolution was the enfranchisement of women, which was represented in terms of “Emancipation of Women” (*Azady-e Zanan*) the same phrase that Reza Shah had used to force the unveiling of women back in 1934. This was also a showy and performative act. In a country where the shah’s secret police created fear to manage discontent, or in a nation with no semblance of free and fair elections, enfranchising women did not appear as a genuine reform to socialists or nationalists who otherwise would have supported it. However, the act alienated the most conservative clerical elites who linked and represented it as another attempt to revive Reza Shah’s unveiling.<sup>107</sup> In his 1941 essay, *Kashf al-Asrar*, Ayatollah Khomeini had devalued Reza Shah by writing that “they [the state-elites] regard the civilization and advancement of the country as dependent upon women going naked in the streets, or to quoting their own idiotic words, turning half of the population into workers by unveiling them.”<sup>108</sup> Khomeini’s 1941 sentiment was again expressed in 1963. Islamists re-represented the shah’s “Emancipation of Women” in the same terms—an attempt to corrupt them. Other components of Mohamad Reza Shah’s White Revolution, such as the workers’ right to profit sharing or nationalization of water, forests, and grazing lands, were grand and showy without any substantive research or surveys done on them.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> For more information on the shah’s land reform, see, Hooglund, *Land and Revolution in Iran, 1960-1980*. Also, see Najmabadi, *Land Reform and Social Change in Iran*, Nima Nattagh, *Agriculture & Regional Development in Iran* (Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, England: Middle East & North African Studies Press, 1986). Baldwin, *Planning and Development in Iran*, pp. 71-98.

<sup>107</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini* (Berkeley, Calif.: Mizan Press, 1980), pp. 171-172.

<sup>108</sup> Baldwin, *Planning and Development in Iran*.

<sup>109</sup> See Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, pp. 89-90.

In sum, the representation of policies and practices of the state-elites alienated socialists, Islamists, and nationalists. While the state valued the U.S.-Iran relations as a natural alliance between two sovereign states, contending discourses devalued the alliance as a master-slave relationship. While the shah valued his reform as a revolutionary unity between the shah and the people, contending discourse represented it as a U.S. design. In other words, the official state language was widening the gap between state and society rather than communicating with the society.

In a 1963 public opinion poll taken by a West German research group, 85% of Iranians considered the White Revolution and American aid to Iran as an American design:

[T]o make the rich richer. and only 8 percent thought that it as 'improving the standard of living of the many.' Half of those polled said that the United States is too much on the side of having things remain as they are. Finally, 33 percent saw America as 'aggressive,' compared to 19 percent who thought the same of the USSR.<sup>110</sup>

In a qualitative comparative analysis of literature written in that era, Ahmad Karim-Hakkak analyzed the spirit of the time:

[As] the monarchical state and Iranians pursue fundamentally different visions and ideals, many Iranian poets and writers began to articulate their impression of this difference in their literary works in one form or another of opposite entities, positioning themselves with increasing self-consciousness against the state power structure. As the state gradually consolidated its sway over the society through the late 1950s and early 1960s, the dominant mood vested in literary works turned from one of forceful resistance to one of pessimistic despair. Such ideals as liberty, democracy, and social justice were portrayed as precious pieces of an identity being cruelly trampled in an inevitable collision between the people and the political power structure.<sup>111</sup>

In brief, the consequence of the White Revolution was the further consolidation of power of the shah on the one hand, and the increasing alienation of his opposition on the other.

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<sup>110</sup> Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, "Revolutionary Posturing: Iranian Writers and the Iranian Revolution of 1979," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23, no. 4 (1991): p. 508.

<sup>111</sup> Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari'ati* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998), p. 215.

Consequently, by 1964, policies and practices of the state were interpreted differently from those intended or understood by the state.

### **Classifying the Other**

In the official language of the state, a hierarchical construction occurred of the imagined “enemies of the state.” The state represented socialists and Mussadiq as the highest security threats against the state. Accordingly, the state used its repressive means to first target communists, then nationalists, and lastly Islamists—despite the rising power and prestige of Islamists. Constitutive of this classification was the state’s self-interpretation rather than some tangible threat that socialists posed but nationalists or Islamists did not pose.

The state monitored, interrogated, and jailed—if not killed—those accused of being communist, associating with communist, or reading communist’s texts. The state, however, allowed Islamic intellectuals to operate somewhat freely because SAVAK speculated that Islamists are naturally anti-communist. The perception that Islamists were naturally anti-communist was the case of how the state perceived Ali Shariati, who was one of the most influential public intellectuals. He popularized a political Islam whose content combined socialism, democratic nationalism, and Islam among thousands of his loyal followers. Ali Shariati was indeed the symbol of the rise of a modern Islamic discourse.

In 1963, SAVAK arrested and then released Shariati for lecturing. Shariati 1963’s letter of confession is revealing. In this letter, Shariati argued that his lectures were against the communist Tudeh Party and communism and did not target the shah whom he respected.<sup>112</sup> Although this confessional letter was written by Shariati, it revealed what the state-elites in general and SAVAK directors desired to hear. In the letter, Shariati praised SAVAK agents for

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<sup>112</sup> Ladjevardi, "Shahpour Bakhtiyar," pp. 212-215.

treating him well and thanked them for providing him a comfortable condition under which he could freely speak his mind. Then he convincingly wrote that his Imperial Majesty, Mohamad Reza Shah, had indeed introduced a “revolutionary” idea for the social transformation of Iran to the extent that was possible. Shariati then theorized that the shah-centered state is a Bonapartist state in which the shah “is a supra-class figure, free of all class attachments. . . . Therefore, all classes could conceivably benefit from fundamental transformations without resorting to violence and engaging in revolutionary activity.”<sup>113</sup>

Shariati was writing in the official language of the state and the senior officer in charge of his case recommended his release under surveillance. While this game of arrest and release was repeated for years, Shariati became one of the most influential public intellectuals whose speeches at *Husseini-e Ershah* (The Center of Guidance for Hussein’s Followers) attracted thousands of young people. His books were reprinted many times and his speeches and lectures were tape-recorded or transcribed and distributed. I attended a few of these meetings in the early 1970s. The atmosphere was electrified with revolutionary ideas, and middle class looking young men and women, who wore fashionable clothes and hairstyles, attended. For most attendees, it was inconceivable to hear Shariati and think of him as less of a threat to the state than communists or nationalists, but SAVAK continued to rank him as such. For SAVAK, it was inconceivable that Shariati was more of a threat to the state than communists. This condition of conceivability prevented SAVAK from assessing or predicting the danger of Islamists to the state until it was too late for the regime.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Zonis, *The Political Elite of Iran*, p. 315.

<sup>114</sup> As it turned out, the CIA did not predict the rise of Islamists in Iran either.

The logic behind classifying Islamists as the least threat and communists as the most threat to the state was embedded in the official state discourse. In its representation, the state classified religion and religious ideologies as fanaticism and thus anti-progress and development. A statistical survey conducted by Marvin Zonis at the time found that two-thirds of the high-ranking state officials thought religious leaders were unprogressive and unhelpful in modernizing the country.<sup>115</sup> The logic behind this interpretation was based on another set of interpretation that showed history as linear, progressive, and evolutionary. And the perception that the time for religion as expired was a dominant representation at the time.

The very nature of proposing a linear, progressive history dictates its own logic. By conceptualizing a linear history, what is placed in the past cannot belong to the future. And this is how the state-elites categorized Islamists—belonging to the past. It was impossible for them to imagine that an Islamic movement could have the potential to mobilize young, educated, urban, and an increasing middle class population. Zonis's statistical survey did not even bother to ask whether or not the state-elites perceived Islamists as a security threat. Based on this logic, the state did not rank Islamists as a revolutionary threat. The assessment of continuing to rank Islamists as less of a threat to the state than socialists was despite the fact that in this era Islamists were calling for the overthrow of the regime, while socialists and nationalists were advocating coexistence with the regime of Mohamad Reza Shah.

In the 1960s, for example, secular nationalists led by Shahpour Bakhtiyar, socialists associated with the Tudeh Party, and democratic socialists connected with Khalil Maleki (the Third Force) were all calling for the state to hold a free and fair election. This was the extent of their demand. Their internal debates centered on how to force the government to adhere to the

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<sup>115</sup> Ladjevardi, "Shahpour Bakhtiyar."



existing constitution and allow them to participate in the government. Hence, the aim was not to antagonize the regime. In other words, the secular opposition had agreed to tone down its anti-American, anti-shah, and anti-Israel rhetoric in public so that the regime could co-op them. They essentially advocated what Bakhtiyar described as a “minimalist demand” for holding “a semi-free election.”<sup>116</sup> But the state would not allow nationalists or communists to participate in the election because they were perceived as threats to the state.

### **The Discourse of Modern Islam: Political Islam and Return to Self**

By 1960, Islamists had begun to represent a worldview that was both evolutionary and revolutionary. It was “evolutionary” because it incorporated all the basic signifiers previously constructed in both modern and traditional Iranian discourses. It was “revolutionary” because it called for the overthrow of the regime as a symptom of Iranian Self-hate, alienation, and Western domination. A revolutionary and evolutionary Islam was represented by de-linking development from Westernization. In other words, Islamists began to represent development in terms of returning to an Islamic-Iranian Self rather than emulating the Western models of development. Most significantly, however, was how Islamists retrieved Islamic, Shi’i, and Sufi historical texts to represent a supposedly “true Islamic ideology” for life both here and hereafter. Accordingly, this modern Islamists constructed a new political ideology that represented traditional clerical conservatism and quietism as “un-Islamic.” Instead, they offered an alternative Islamic ideology.

In contrast to a compromising call on the part of socialists and nationalists, by 1960, Islamists were demanding a systematic and revolutionary change. They called not only for a violent and revolutionary overthrow of the regime, but also a modernizing vision of Islam that devalued Islamic or Sufi quietism, religious conservatism, and any other compromises with the

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<sup>116</sup> Interview with Dabashi and NetLibrary Inc., *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*.

regime. For example, Mehdi Bazargan, who became the prime minister of the provisional government after the fall of the regime, became very popular for representing Islam as a modern and modernizing ideology that was represented as both divine and scientific. In the same vein, Ayatollah Taleqani represented Islam as a socialistic religion concerned with class justice while he criticized the Marxian interpretation of historical materialism and Soviet-style socialism. Ayatollah Motahri represented Islam as both a rational philosophy and faithful theology. Ali Shariati began to represent Islam as a modern, socialist, democratic, scientific, and revolutionary ideology that appealed to young, educated, and urban people. Even Jalal Al-e Ahmad, who had started his political writings as a socialist, began to advocate Islam as a cultural dimension of an Iranian Self versus the Western Other, a dimension whose loss, he argued, had created all the miseries Iranians had suffered since Iran had encountered the West. Ayatollah Khomeini, a disciple of Ayatollah Bourujerdi who had advocated quietism, also began to call for the overthrowing of the regime by advocating an Islamic state that was modern, modernizing, Islamic, socialist, and democratic.<sup>117</sup> Most importantly, modern Islamists were not necessary from the clerical establishment. For example, although Mehdi Bazargan, Ali Shariati, and Jalal Al-e Ahmad had a strong affinity for Islamic thought, all of them had a European education and had done extensive traveling and living in the West, as well as having in-depth contacts with well-known Western intellectuals. In other words, modern Islamists were familiar not only with the Islamic school of thought, but also with the West and Western philosophy. For a brief understanding of the modern Islamic thought, which became the main contender of the regime, I will now review the interpretation of three important figures.

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<sup>117</sup> For example, Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New Brunswick Transaction Publishers 2006).

## Mehdi Bazargan

In the 1930s, Mehdi Bazargan was among the first group of students whom Reza Shah had sent to Europe for receiving education. Upon his return to Iran, he began to teach at the School of Engineering at Tehran University in 1940. He was not, however, known for contributing to the field of thermodynamics, which was his field of specialty. From an ideological perspective, he was instead known for representing an Islamic ideology that denounced Sufi's quietism, Shi'i ritualism, and the established clerical institutions. In various texts, he valued what he called a progressive, modern, scientific, and revolutionary Islam. Bazargan scathingly criticized the established Shi'i clergy for adhering to a ritualistic and irrational view of Islam. Interestingly, Bazargan's criticism of the clergy was similar to those of Ahmad Kasravi's views, but from a modernist perspective. Kasravi was assassinated for being anti-Islam, but Bazargan was praised for promoting a "scientific" view of Islam. Bazargan called for an Islamic revolution to establish an Islamic state based on an Islamic ideology.

By 1964, when the shah charged Bazargan with threatening the state's security, Bazargan's vision of Islam had entered the language—it no longer belonged to his close circle of intellectuals and political activists.<sup>118</sup> Much like Khomeini, Taleqani, Motahari, Jalal Al-e Ahmad, and Shariati, Bazargan showed "true" Islam as being "modern," "scientific," "lawful," "democratic," "just," and in accordance with "Islamic ethics," which was both evolutionary and revolutionary.

Bazargan's articulatory logic was that of an Islamist who promoted class justice and made class analysis in accord with socialism. He was a socialist who emphasized modernism, a

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<sup>118</sup> As a middle school student in the small city of Shiraz, I personally used to attend meetings that schoolteachers used to organize for Qur'anic reading and interpretation. Many young people attended. The dominant theme in these discussions was that Islam was a scientific theology, a rational philosophy, and a revolutionary political ideology that could purify Self from the ever-increasing cultural contamination designed to maintain Western domination of Iran.

modernist who advocated Mussadiq's brand of democratic nationalism, a nationalist who valued constitutionalism. Above all, Bazargan was a man who envisioned an Islamic state based on a progressive "Islamic ideology" that was familiar in Islamic law or *Shariat* and Islamic Sufism or *Tariqat*.<sup>119</sup>

Similar to modernists, Bazargan believed in a progressive, determined, and evolutionary view of history, but based on a different articulatory logic from those of modernists. While modernists' logic of a progressive history was based on positing man's relation with nature, Bazargan's logic of an evolutionary history was based on man's relation with God. While modernists viewed the relationship between man and nature as primarily a physical or material relation between man and nature, modern Islamists interpreted the relationship between man and God as primarily a metaphysical relationship between man and God's consciousness. For modernists, human history is a progressive path toward domination of man over nature. From a different logic, Bazargan proposed that human history is a progressive path toward God as the perfect universal consciousness. But Bazargan was not the only one with this interpretation of historical progress. Notwithstanding their differences, Ali Shariati, Ayatollah Morteza Motahari, Sayed Mohammad Taleqani, Allameh Hussein Tabatabai, and Ayatollah Khomeini shared Bazargan's view of a progressive history, with which they all identified and signified by the word *Tohid*. In Islamic traditional texts, *Tohid* meant the belief in monotheism, but in modern

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<sup>119</sup> Traditionally, *Tariqat*, which was highly apolitical, was represented in an oppositional relation with *Shariat* that was highly political. Notwithstanding the differences among various Islamic schools of thought as to what constitutes the content of *Shariat and Tariqat*, the methodological differences between the two schools had been translated into *Shariat* as a political, prescriptive, formal, and reproduced through the clerical institution, and *Tariqat* as apolitical, highly individualistic, intuitive, informal, and reproduced by devout followers on their own free will. But the modernist Islamic discourse both have come together as though they have been an integral part of each other. Ali Shariati was the best known articulator of this combination.

Islamic texts, while *Tohid* maintained its old meaning, it was also linked to the concept of a progressive path toward unity with God as the only perfection of universal consciousness.<sup>120</sup>

However, Bazargan's reference to *Tohid*, as a progressive unity between man and God, was a familiar concept of *Vahadt* (unity of consciousness), which was similar to the language of Islamic mystics, such as Rumi, Hafez, and hundreds of other literary works. In other words, Bazargan's articulation of *Tohid* had traces of Islamic mysticism, which had traditionally interpreted and practiced Islam with a different methodological approach known as *Tariqat* (methodological path). *Tariqatists* practiced an Islamic theology that was ascetic, anti-establishment, anti-political, and interpretative. As such, it was extremely individualistic. For *Tariqatists*, the progressive path to unity with God was one of personal love, commitment, devotion, intuition, and interpretation and not necessarily text-based rituals, prayers, and clerical prescriptions. This methodological difference had traditionally pitted *Tariqatists* (*Sufis* and *Arefis*) against the Shi'i clergy (*Shariatists* or *Mullahs* and *Mujtaheds*) whose methodology focused on *Sunna* (tradition), which was text-based, prescriptive, and rationalistic. Its interpretation was limited *Maraj-e taqlid* (the qualified sources of imitation or emulation). But modern Islamists were bringing these two opposing traditions together as if they had always been mutually inclusive.

Bazargan articulated his interpretation of progressive histories into two familiar Islamic sub-discourses (*Sharia* and *Tariga*). This new interpretation was both *Tariqatist* and *Shariatist* without being either one. The discourse had traces of both in it. On the one hand, Bazargan articulated his arguments in the authoritative Qur'anic, Islamic, and Shi'i texts, myths, and

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<sup>120</sup> In addition to various writings, see Mehdi Bazargan, *Pa Beh Pa-Ya Vahy (Step by Step with Revelation: An Interpretation of Qur'an)*, 2 vols. (Tehran Daftar Nashr Farhang Islami, 1377/1978).

common laws of *Sharia* to represent a political Islam that was prescriptive in its teaching.<sup>121</sup> On the other hand, he was appealing to individualistic love, devotion, commitment, and asceticism of *Tariqatists* to represent Islam as a path to progressive consciousness toward (*Tohid*) or the unity of man with God. Discursively, this was a great interpretative shift.

Traditionally, Islamic-Iranian mystics followed a seven-step path (*Tariqat*) toward a progressive move in the direction of unity with God (*Vahdat*). For reaching *Vahdat*, an individual gathered his will, love, commitment, and gave up bodily needs or desires to achieve that unity, which was deemed unreachable but progress toward it was possible.<sup>122</sup> Therefore, the *Tariqatist* discourse was highly apolitical, anti-materialist, and individualist. However, modern Islamists in general and Bazargan in particular were highly political, materialists, and collectivists. They struggled against the unjust distribution of wealth in the society, as well as the erosion of Islamic mores. Nevertheless, modern Islamists re-articulated the notion of a progressive path to perfection. This path to perfection was seen in terms of the struggle of individuals to improve their political, social, and material conditions by attaining an Islamic collective consciousness.<sup>123</sup> This new way of thinking Islamic was represented as the struggle to improve consciousness through understanding and practicing one's religious responsibility to Self, the community, and God, which was supposed to be the path toward the unity with God. The path to unity (*Tohid*) was no longer perceived as refraining from worldly affairs. It was

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<sup>121</sup> Zarin-kub, *Dar Jeztejoya Tasvof Dar Iran (a Survey of Sufism in Iran)*

<sup>122</sup> Mahdi Bazargan, *Bazgasht Beh Qur'an*, Chap-i 1. ed. (Tehran: Bungah-i Tarjamah va Nashr-i Kitab, 1360), Mahdi Bazargan, *Inqilab-I Iran Dar Du Harakat*, Chap-i. ed. (Tehran: s.n., 1964/1363), Mahdi Bazargan, *Hukumat-E Jahan-I Va Hid Navishtah-Ya Mahdi Bazargan*, Chap-i 2 ed. (Tehran: Shirkat-i Sahami, 1965), Mehdi Bazargan, *Muslim: Social and Global (Muselman: Ejtema-I and Johan-I)* (Tehran: Ershad, 1965/1344), Mahdi Bazargan, *Khanah-E Mardum* (Tehran: Shirkat-e Sahami, 1967), Mahdi Bazargan, *Bisat Va Idulugi* (Tabriz: Ilmiyah, 1968), Mahdi Bazargan, *Mahdi Bazargan Pamphlets* (1976), Mahdi Bazargan and Muhammad Mahdi Jafari, *Bad Va Baran Dar Qur'an* (Tehran: Shirkat-e Sahami-ye Intishar, 1974).

<sup>123</sup> Bazargan and Jafari, *Bad Va Baran Dar Qur'an*.

rather about the worldly affairs of serving self and the community. Hence, while Bazargan rejected quietism and pure spiritualism, he was promoting active participation along with personal love, devotion, and commitment to God's work, all for achieving both material and spiritual perfection for the individual, as well as collective material improvement and improvement of consciousness.

Bazargan used the language of *Tariqatist* to represent a progressive history of collective consciousness. He also valued materialism and activism. In fact, he quoted Marx to express that the material conditions of life have historically corresponded with the progressive collective consciousness of mankind. He stated that the manifestation of any collective consciousness in a given time and space is different political ideologies, such as feudalism, capitalism, socialism, and communism. In many ways, Bazargan's argument was utilizing a Marxian class and dialectical analysis to represent its interpretation of progressive history, but by incorporating the familiar languages of *Tariqatists* and *Shariatists* instead of the unfamiliar language of socialists or nationalists. Bazargan idealized an Islamic state, which, he argued, would become possible only if Iranian collective consciousness would progress to the point of attaining an "Islamic ideology."

In this interpretation of Islam, the relationship between *Shariat* and *Tariqat* became complementary rather than opposing. As such, the previously considered personal and private became political, religious, and public. The *Tariqatist's* interpretative and individualistic love, commitment, and devotion to God became the public and political way of devotion to political participation aimed at establishing Islamic rules, laws, and norms. Bazargan promoted an Islamic ideology that viewed political participation in terms of acting: both rationally and spiritually, Self

governing politically and religiously, improving Self materially and spiritually, and viewing Self as an individual and a collective.

Bazargan's "Islamic ideology" consisted of three components: *Sharia Laws*, Shi'i clerical establishment, and personal-political-religious devotion. He argued that Sharia law, which can be summed up as Islamic laws, norms, rules, customs, and consensus according to the holy *Qur'an* and traditional texts and practices during the reign of prophet Mohamad, was the only reliable source of guidance. From this representation, consensus (*ijma*) of *Shi'i Mujtahedean* (Islamic scholars) was the most qualified source of interpreting divine laws according to the exigencies of any given time and space. Bazargan argued that Shi'ites are obliged to follow the most learned living *mujtahed* to progress with the changes and development in the world.<sup>124</sup> He argued in favor of academic, theological specialization so unity could occur between universities and seminaries, a unity that would combine modern natural and social sciences, as well human and divine laws. To achieve these goals, Bazargan argued in favor of "scientific interpretations" of *Qur'an*, which he contended would reveal the most advanced technological innovations. For example, in one of his essays, "Wind and Rain," Bazargan argued that the science of meteorology was already written in *Qur'an*, but it had not been understood yet. However, it is not clear whether Bazargan urged his readers to master interpretive skills to discover scientific knowledge by a careful reading of the holy text, or his readers should first master a particular discipline, as he did, and then try to find it in *Qur'anic* verses.<sup>125</sup> Nevertheless, his texts are full of analogies taken from his engineering field of thermodynamics, which gives credence to the

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<sup>124</sup> Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, pp. 340-345.

<sup>125</sup> Bazargan, *Bazgasht Beh Qur'an*, Bazargan, *Inqilab-I Iran Dar Du Harakat*, Bazargan, *Hukumat-E Jahan-I Va Hid Navishtah-Ya Mahdi Bazargan*, Bazargan, *Muslim: Social and Global (Muselman: Ejtema-I and Johan-I)*, Bazargan, *Khanah-E Mardum*, Bazargan, *Bisat Va Idulugi*, Bazargan, *Mahdi Bazargan Pamphlets*, Mehdi Bazargan, *Az Khoda Parsti Ta Khoda-Parasti* (Huston: Book Distribution Center 1976/1355), Bazargan and Jafari, *Bad Va Baran Dar Qur'an*.



notion that Islam, science, modernization, and development are not opposed to each other as the regime had represented them to be.

Finally, Bazargan emphasized that the intended purpose for religious rituals, prayers, and obligations is political, and religious leaders who advised their followers to abide by religious rituals or prayers—just for the sake of being saved—did not understand religion or politics. One of his examples was the ritual of going to Mecca. He argued that the purpose for this mandatory pilgrimage—for those who could afford to make the long journey—is a political act to unify the nation of Islam. His interpretation of the call for collective Friday Prayers, fasting, and other Shi'i rituals was in the same vein. He argued that these religious responsibilities without political purposes were mindless acts of irrationality and therefore a path away from progressing toward the collective consciousness or getting close to God. Notwithstanding their differences, modern Islamists had the same view of what they called “Islamic ideology,” which was a shared understanding or a new interpretation on which the 1979 revolution was constructed.<sup>126</sup>

Bazargan's ideal state did not differ in its basic signifiers from other contending discourses. It was an ideal state that could provide security, human economic development, freedom, equality, justice, and democracy. Accordingly, this ideal state must not discriminate based on race, status, and knowledge. Women must be equal to men and have the right to participate in the administration of the government. The state must educate all its people, and through public education and Islamic ethics, the state must and will eradicate corruption. Finally, he described an ideal Islamic nation as well. An ideal nation is an inclusive collectivity that recognized the people's right to form group associations. But these ideas were not particularly

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<sup>126</sup> Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism*, 1st ed. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1996).

Islamic. They were certainly values that were represented, understood, and constructed within the Iranian contending discourses, albeit with different hierarchic formation.

In other words, values, which were expressed in Bazargan's discourse of modern political Islam, incorporated the traditional basic signifiers, such as security, development, law, people, and justice. They were expressed in terms of Islamic *Sharia* laws, Shi'i clerical interpretation, and Sufi's individualistic devotion.

By 1963, while Bazargan's articulation of an ideal Islamic state remained somewhat controversial among some in the clerical establishment and obviously among socialists and nationalists, his revolutionary position against the state was highly valued among all contending discourses that opposed the regime. At the time, any rhetorical representation, which devalued the Mohamad Reza Shah, delegitimized the presence of the United States, demonized Israel, equated capitalism to imperialism, and attributed the moral corruption of the country to Western liberalism was a shared value among all Iranian contending discourses except the official state discourse.<sup>127</sup> These shared values were beginning to become the unifying signifiers under which a hegemonic discourse was being constructed against the state. Bazargan wrote:

What the Iranian nation wants is just one word . . . "Freedom." . . . This word is not Hebrew that for understanding it you [Mohamad Reza Shah] need to hire advisors from Israel. . . . We say that the Shah does not have the right to establish law, to install [or] dismiss government . . . according to his views and will, and yet he be [considered] sinless, unaccountable, with a sacred, even everlasting position. This is reactionary, this is despotism, and this is dictatorship.<sup>128</sup>

At this time, as the leaders of secular nationalists and socialists were wishing for the regime to allow them to participate in a "semi free election," the Freedom Movement, led by Bazargan, "openly called for the violent destruction of the Pahlavi regime: "Down with the

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<sup>127</sup> For example, see Boroujerdi examines the works of public intellectuals whose works inspired the growth of a particular nativist view of perceiving Iran as a nation dominated by the West and desiring to be free from it.

<sup>128</sup> Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, p. 336.

Shah's despicable regime. Death to Israel, the shah's monstrous master! Salutation to the blessed spirit of the shroud-bloodied martyrs of the Iranian people!"<sup>129</sup> These types of texts represented the shah as a heretic who claimed divine sovereignty. While Bazargan muted a large part of Shi'i and Sunni's legitimization of monarchic rules, he argued that the concept of divine monarchic sovereignty was un-Islamic. Meanwhile, his reverence for Khomeini's leadership was no less than viewing him as a divine political leader. For example, in June 1963, when the state arrested Ayatollah Khomeini for one of his fiery speeches against the regime, Bazargan stated:

In Iranian history, this is the first time when exalted position of the supreme deputyship of Imam Ali, peace be upon him, is insulted and the source of exemplary conduct, His Highness Ayatollah Khomeini is kidnapped and imprisoned.<sup>130</sup>

In this text, representing Khomeini as the supreme deputy of Imam Ali has a constitutive logic that represents Khomeini as the divine appointee of Imam Ali and the inheritor of Ali's political leadership. Additionally, Bazargan maintained that the Shi'i clergy has always kept its independence from monarchic rulers and resisted tyranny and despotic absolutism. But Bazargan's representation of the role of Shi'i's clergy was a new interpretation of history. At least since the Safavid dynasty, the Shi'i clergy had cooperated with the monarchs. In short, the social content of Bazargan's Islam was filled with values constructed in modernist, nationalist, and socialist discourses, but articulated in the familiar language of Sharia, *Tariqa*, and Shi'i words, images, myths, and narratives.

### **Jalal Al-e Ahmad**

As Bazargan, Al-e Ahmad represented Mohamad Reza Shah's revolution as another U.S. design to subjugate Iran. But Al-e Ahmad was an essayist rather than a political activist.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 336-337.

<sup>130</sup> Dabashi and NetLibrary Inc., *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, p. 339. Also quoted in Ahmad, *On the Intellectuals (Dar Khedmat and Khianat Roshanfekran)*, p. 330.

Nevertheless, his embedded values were similar to Bazargan's values, as well as other modern Islamists. For example, on the shah's revolution, he wrote: "These days everything, including revolution, is bureaucratic, performative, and showy."<sup>131</sup> On the shah's referendum, he claimed that in the old days landlords used to bus their subject-peasants to ballot boxes. These days, however, it is the ballot boxes that have been moved in front of ministries for subject-bureaucrats to cast their votes in exchange for their next month's salary.<sup>132</sup> Regarding land reform, he sarcastically wrote:

To avoid military coup organized by retired colonels, they [the regime] evicted Turcoman, for example, and then gave those lands to military colonels to cultivate cotton, wheat, and watermelons, and now one can certainly boast about all the cotton and watermelon crops we enjoy! How good they are!<sup>133</sup>

On a different occasion, he criticized the land reform for being too little too late: "Converting landless peasants to small farmers could have been useful 200 years ago. Now we should create large mechanized cooperatives instead."<sup>134</sup> On the Education Corps, he wrote: "I have worked with and taught some of these Corps conscripts, while some try to get along with villagers, most want to 'educate' them not to have "bad" table manners, mud houses, and native clothes."<sup>135</sup> However, Al-e Ahmad's most subversive contention, which entered into the language as a clear and concise concept, was his call for a return to an Iranian-Islamic Self, a Self that was supposed to be purified from the contamination of Westerners and Western-like modernizers.

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<sup>131</sup> Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi (Westoxication)* (Tehran Ravaq, 1344/1962), p. 172.

<sup>132</sup> Ahmad, *The Curse of the Land (Nefrin-E Zamin)*, p. 254.

<sup>133</sup> ———, *Gharbzadegi (Westoxication)*, p. 162.

<sup>134</sup> Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Three Year Accomplishment (Karnam-Eh S-Eh Saleh)* 3ed. (Tehran Ravaq, 1357/1978), p. 169.

<sup>135</sup> Bostock and Jones, *Planning and Power in Iran: Ebtehaj and Economic Development under the Shah*, p. 115.

## Return to Self

During this era, the interpretation of the concept of *Irani-Khareji* (Iranian-foreigners) began to shift from perceiving external or physical enemies to internal and metaphysical enemy-foreigners. In the discourse, *Kharejian* (foreigners) were no longer merely linked to the physical presence or domination of Americans, British, or Russians. They were instead represented as Western-like others within.

Iran was represented as a sick body afflicted with a Western disease that was debilitating the Iranian mind and body. This pathological analogy was similar to how modernists had described Iran since the 1906 constitutional revolution a dying patient whose survival depended upon adopting Westernization, which was equated to modernization in modernist discourses. In contrast, by 1960, modern Islamists represented Iran as a dying patient whose survival depended on rejecting Westernization but not modernization, which they equated with a return to Islamic-Self.<sup>136</sup>

For modern Islamists, the linkage between Westernization and modernization broke apart. They began to devalue both capitalism and socialism as Western-style modernism, which had enslaved Iran. Eventually, public intellectuals, such as Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati, began to challenge the regime without directly confronting it. In much more confrontational ways, however, modern Islamists directly challenged socialists and nationalists by devaluing them as soulless, cultureless, and they alienated Iranians in their monkey-see-monkey-do attitude toward the West. Meanwhile, they also blamed the established Shi'i clergy and their conservatism,

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<sup>136</sup> "If a patient will surely die unless he has a serious operation, and he might not survive the operation, is there any sensible person who would say: don't operate? That is Iran's positions," said Ebtehaj. See Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi* (*Westoxication*), Ahmad, *On the Intellectuals* (*Dar Khedmat and Khianat Roshanfekran*).

quietism, ritualism, and fanaticism as Iranian backwardness in relation to Western powers.<sup>137</sup> In other words, modern Islamists began to challenge values previously represented and constructed as Western modernism or Eastern traditionalism. Instead, they advocated a return to an Iranian-Islamic Self. This conceptualization of Self was, however, much different from the Self projected by nationalists, socialists, and the monarchic modernists.

For example, Al-e Ahmad argued that the West had not only taken Iran's wealth, but also its pride, spirit, and traditional Islamic-local wisdom. The argument was that Iran had been afflicted with the debilitating plague of modernism of which the monarchic regime was just one of its symptoms. He named this disease *garbzadegi*, a compound term consisting of *garb* (West) and *zadgi* (beaten, struck, afflicted, infatuated, or possessed).<sup>138</sup> This term invoked the idea that Iran was afflicted with a disease like that of the black plague (*taun-zadegi*), struck by a natural disaster like an earthquake (*zelzeleh-zadegi*), possessed by mythological devil-like creatures (*jenzadegi*), or mindlessly infatuated with the West (*garb-zadegi*).<sup>139</sup> In other words, discursively, the West was being linked to negative narratives, such as such plagues, natural disasters, evil spirits, and mindlessness. When Jalal Al-e Ahmad coined the term *garb-zadegi*, which has been translated into the English language as "Westoxication" or "West-struck," his audience could immediately understand what he meant.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari'ati*. Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism*, pp. 63-65.

<sup>138</sup> Al-e Ahmad claimed that he first heard the term *garb-zadegi* from Ahmad Farid, who taught Western philosophy at the University of Iran and was one of the original mentors for devaluing Western modernity. For more information on Farid, see Darius Ashuri, *Us and Modernity (Ma Va Moderniat)*, 3 ed. (Tehran: Mua'seseh Farhang-ya Saraat 1384/1995).

<sup>139</sup> In myths, *Jens* are human-like creatures who live in a parallel universe with the people and at times take over their minds and bodies.

<sup>140</sup> Words such as *Farangi nema* (Western look-alike), *fokokli* or a person who wore a bowtie, gigolo or its Farsi version *geegul*, referred to a person wanting to look or act Western. In some Iranian movies, for example, *Abraham*

*Garbzadegi* was the act of naming an existential and familiar concept embedded in the sub-discourse of *Irani-khareji*, although the *Khareji* in this interpretation was no longer merely external or physical; instead, it was internal and metaphysical. In this emerging interpretation, the familiar concept of Iran-Khareji was being re-represented as Khareji taking over the mind of an Iranian.

As a reminder, the West had been dichotomized—the West as a “foreign colonizer” and the West as a “humanist ideal.” The West—home to foreigners, colonizers, and their Iranian agents—was linked to Britain, Russia, and, after the 1953 coup, America. The other West was a conceptual ideal in which science, philosophy, and technology, democracy, civilization, and industrialization flourished. This ideal West was supposed to be emulated. For modern Islamists, this boundary between the West as “foreign colonizer” and the West as an ideal disappeared—the West became a dark physical and metaphysical place.<sup>141</sup> Its physical presence was linked to Britain, the Soviet Union, and America, and its metaphysical entity was linked to those Iranians who admired its idealness. In this way, the familiar language of labeling opponents as “agents,” “stooges,” “spies,” “hired hands,” or “puppets” of foreign powers was extended to mean those who simply valued Western modernity as progressive human achievement rather than means of domination, alienation, and Self-hate. From this perspective, the new genre of “committed literature” was created.<sup>142</sup> This literature, depicted the West (*Garb*), which literally means where the sun sets, as a place where foreigners have always tried to invade the East (*Sharq*). The East

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*Goes to New York*, derided this stereotype. One of the oldest narrative of this stereotype is, however, Muhammad Ali Jamal-zadeh’s satirical short story, *Farsi Is Sweet*, which was written in the 1920s.

<sup>141</sup> For the debate between Darius Ashuri, who advocated modernism but an opponent of the regime and modern Islamists, such as Al-e Ahmad and others who posited the West in an oppositional relation with the East, see the collection of Ashuri’s essays, Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi (Westoxication)*, pp. 149-150.

<sup>142</sup> This genre included secular and Islamic literature. For example, people such as Ahmad Shamlu, Hushang Gulsheri, and Khosru Golsurkhi became famous for writing in this genre. For further information, see Majid Sharifi’s non-published paper, *The Discourse of Kharejian in the Committed Modern Iranian Literature*.

literally means where the sun rises and life begins. In other words, the West-East dichotomy was translated into a Manichean world of good and evil, and this was also a familiar concept in both Islamic, Shi'i, and Persian myths. Thus, when this worldview was coined by Ale-Ahmad, it appeared as if this foreignness within has been there since eternity. However, this worldview was in sharp contrast to previous literary works. For example, during the rule of Reza Shah, the dominant theme in unofficial literature portrayed the West as good and the East as evil, backward, and primitive.<sup>143</sup>

Al-e Ahmad wrote, "A West-struck person always obsessively and mindlessly pays attention to Western voices and gestures."<sup>144</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini repeated the same sentiments:

A West-struck person even knows himself from the perspective of Orientalists, who are true expertise for promoting Colonialism, although in their deceptive and treacherous ways, and by pretending their love and devotion for the knowledge of Islam and the East, they have constructed a thick veil of ignorance in front of you, the young generation. Behind this thick veil, they have hidden the "true" dimensions of Islam. . . . Now, however, all you who have been enlightened with the light of Islam must wake up those who have been afflicted with this West-struckness.<sup>145</sup>

Similarly, Ali Shariati represented Iran in an oppositional relation with the West in the same way:

When I say, "we," I mean "we the Easterners," "we the Muslims," "we the Iranians" . . . who have experienced terrifying events and witnessed how the treacherous conspiracies perpetuated by our own Iranian "Left" and "Right" in cooperation with the brutal and violent forces of foreign powers that together have tried to uproot all traces of our national identity. As a terrified bird in captivity, we are captured by so many "isms," such as anarchism, Marxism . . . and modernism. The essence of these isms negate our heritage, cause us to be the mindless emulators of the West, and encourage us to passively submit to

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<sup>143</sup> In Chapter 3, "Modernism in the Literature," I discuss how modernism was valued and traditionalism was devalued.

<sup>144</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini, *Sahif-Eh Imam (Collection of Imam Khomeini)* vol. 2 (Tehran: 1349/1970), p. 282.

<sup>145</sup> Ali Shariati, *Johan Beenii and Ideology (Ontology and Ideology)*, 5 ed. (Tehran: Enteshar, 1379/2000), pp. 147-165.



imperialism whose smallest sin is the exploitation of the people and its greatest sin is the destruction of our religion.<sup>146</sup>

In other words, a shift occurred in the sub-discourse of *Irani-khareji*. The emphasis was predominantly on returning to a purified Iranian-Islamic Self in an oppositional relation with the West.

### **Ayatollah Khomeini**

In response to Mohamad Reza Shah's referendum on 26 January 1963, seminary students in Qum began to protest the shah's "revolution." In an attempt to prevent the movement from spreading, the regime continued its terrorizing tactics. In a brutal attack, the military killed some protesting seminary students. On the 40-day memorial of those killed, which turned out to be a practice run for the 1978-1979 revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini called for the overthrow of the regime and establishing an Islamic state.

Referring to Third Shi'i Imam, Hussein Ibn Ali, whom Shi'ites believes stood up to the usurpers of political power, Khomeini announced: "It is now the afternoon of Aushura and this tyrannical regime [that] has no other purpose but to fundamentally oppose Islam and the existence of the religious class."<sup>147</sup> Then he equated the regime with the state of Israel, which discursively is posited as opposed to Islam. He said, "As Israel stands against Islam and *ulama*," so does the Shah.<sup>148</sup> Speaking as if both Iran and Israel were ruled by one regime, he argued that "Israel has assaulted you and your nation; it wishes to seize your economy, to destroy your trade and agriculture, to appropriate your wealth by its agents."<sup>149</sup> Israel will be disappointed,

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<sup>146</sup> Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, p. 177.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

however, because *ulama*, students, and our Qur'anic knowledge are blocking its path and will eventually eliminate it.<sup>150</sup> After glorifying members of the clergy as the “real” representatives of the people and Islam and the “true” contenders against Israel, Mohamad Reza Shah, and the United States, he advised the Shah not to follow his father's example.

Mr. Shah, I advise you to desist in this policy and acts like this. [Referring to the 1941 Allied invasion and the forced abdication of Reza Shah] I don't want the people to offer up thanks if your masters should decide one day that you must leave. I don't want you to become like your father . . . remember how three foreign countries attacked us during World War II. . . . But God knows that everyone was happy to see the Pahlavi had gone. . . . You must reflect . . . and learn from the lessons of your father. . . . Those who are dictating to you . . . will not rescue you when some uproar occurs. . . . They are friends of dollars; they have no religion and no loyalty.<sup>151</sup>

Unlike Bazargan, Shariati, Al-e Ahmad, and other modern Islamists, Khomeini spoke in a straightforward language without trying to wrap his argument with so-called “scientific” or “objective” philosophies or theories. Instead, he passionately spoke in long, simple, and direct verses by appealing to Islamic and Shi'i's authorities and myths. Nevertheless, Khomeini's representation of the regime resembled those of modern Islamists at its core. It depicted the regime as the manifestation of foreign, Western, and un-Islamic powers. He told his audience: “We must collectively confront the West. We must get rid of our Westoxification (*garbzadegi*). Even other Eastern governments must stand up to the West. Buddhist nations must also stand up to the West. We must force the West to retreat.”<sup>152</sup>

In October 1964, Mohamad Reza Shah agreed to extend diplomatic immunity to all Americans working in Iran. Contending discourses represented the act as a new version of “Capitulation Rights,” which Russia and Britain had imposed upon Iran during the Qajar

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., pp. 177-180.

<sup>151</sup> ———, *Sahif-Eh Imam (Collection of Imam Khomeini)* Sep. 1964. v. 1961, p. 1384.

<sup>152</sup> ———, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, p. 189.

dynasty. Reza Shah, with much of fanfare, had abolished this act. At the time, the impression was that the Shah had agreed to exchange Iranian juridical power for a \$200 million loan. Khomeini delivered a devastating speech, which resulted in his deportation, but it secured his leadership position as the most vocal and fearless opponent of the regime.<sup>153</sup> Gradually, the key points of this speech became the central theme among all contending discourses. For the occasion, he announced:

I cannot express the sorrow I feel in my heart. . . . Iran no longer has any festival to celebrate. They [the regime] have turned our festivals to mourning. . . . They have sold us. . . . They have sold our independence. . . . The dignity of Iran has been trampled underfoot. . . . All American military advisors, together with their families . . . and anyone in any way connected to them, are to enjoy legal immunity to any crime they may commit in Iran . . . if some American's servant . . . assassinates your *marja* [source of guidance]. . . the Iranian police does not have the right to apprehend him.<sup>154</sup>

Khomeini said that this indignity is because the nation is represented by a foreign-installed regime that is not sovereign, cannot provide security, has not helped Iran develop, has violated the constitution, is unjust, and most importantly, has corrupted Iranian Islamic norms. In other words, Khomeini utilized all the previously constructed signifiers to devalue the regime, and provote an Islamic theory of nation-state building that would be independent of all foreign powers. He proclaimed that as far as Iran is concerned, "America is worse than Britain; Britain is worse than America, [and] the Soviet Union is worse than both of them. They are all worse and more unclean than each other! But today, it is America that we are concerned with."<sup>155</sup>

In sum, not only Khomeini but also all modern Islamists in the 1960s incorporated values, concepts, and rationalities previously constructed in Iranian contending discourses in a new

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<sup>153</sup> This was the beginning of a particular construction that equated credibility, justness, and even correctness of a political position or leader by the extent to which a person suffered at the hands of Mohamad Reza Shah while continuing to resist. Hence, the logic of argument was not what one said, but how fearlessly he said it.

<sup>154</sup> Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, p. 185.

<sup>155</sup> Afshin Matin-Asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah* (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 2002).

discourse signified by Islam. Although these interpretations remained in the discourse until 1979, after the 1979 revolution, they turned into actual policies and practices of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

For example, with regard to development, modern Islamists rejected both capitalism and socialism and valued a particular developmental model under the rubric of an Islamic development plan. In regard to nationalism, while Islamists incorporated values and concepts constructed in the discourse of democratic nationalism, they defined the Iranian nation Islamic nation with citizenship rights and duties of religious rights and obligations. With regard to foreign policy, the ideal for foreign relations was a re-representation of Mussadiq's policy of "Negative Equilibrium." It meant Islamists viewed the West in general and the Soviet Union, Britain, and America in particular as foreign others. But unlike Mussadiq who admired the humanist aspect of the West, modern Islamists believed that the humanist dimension of the West was a front for its colonizing policies. Therefore, unlike Mussadiq, their approach to the West sought a dual policy of isolation and confrontation. Externally, it wished to isolate itself from Western powers. Internally, it aimed to confront the West culturally. These ideals became the framework of Iran's foreign and domestic politics after the Islamic revolution, although even this framework turned out to be a shifting one.

In brief, in the discourse of modern Islamists, traces of the past mixed in with new hierarchic formations of signifiers constituted the logic behind a series of related narratives posited in oppositional relations with those of the official state discourse. For modern Islamists, concepts, such as Islamic ideology, Islamic state, Islamic nation, religious-political duties and obligations, return to Self, and the West, were discursively represented in oppositional relation to narratives attached to the official state discourse and its constituting sub-discourses.

### **Part III: Consolidation of Power (1964-1978)**

During this era, Iran's oil revenues increased, the United States acquiesced in a shah-centered foreign policy, and Mohamad Reza Shah enhanced his personal power over the state and society. The result of this consolidation was the rapid transformation of the state according to a particular vision of security, modernization, law, people, justice, and ethics embedded in the official state discourse.

#### **Security**

In terms of security, while contending discourses represented the shah as the “servant of America (*nukar-e America*),” the state represented itself as an equal partner in the struggle against the spread of international communism.<sup>156</sup> Based on this logic, for example, the shah sent Iranian troops to fight against pro-Nasser forces in Yemen, armed Iraqi Kurds against the Soviet-leaning regime in Baghdad, and became the only state in the Middle East with close ties to Israel. The shah gladly played the role of being the regional gendarme in accord with the Nixon Doctrine of regionalization of security. Simultaneously, the United States acquiesced to the shah-centered state, for the most part discontinued pushing for political reform, and focused on persuading the shah to purchase more American products.<sup>157</sup>

#### **Development**

In terms of development, U.S. media represented Mohamad Reza Shah as the agent of “progress” and modernization in the Middle East.<sup>158</sup> From the perspective of the United States,

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<sup>156</sup> The word *nukar* literally means a house servant, which also means being loyal to one's master. During this era, because of the state repressive measures, the opposition's rhetorical campaign against the Shah was mostly waged from outside of the country. For example, see Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, p. 95.

<sup>157</sup> Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921: The Pahlavis and After*, pp. 166-167.

<sup>158</sup> Barry M. Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 122.

Iran's average annual growth of 10% from 1963 to 1973 represented successful developmental projects forged by the Shah. This rate of growth became the metric for measuring Iranians' satisfaction with the shah-centered state.<sup>159</sup> Even Iranian experts such as James Bill argued that the rapid growth of the Iranian economy might overcome the societal resentment.<sup>160</sup> In policies and practices, Iran shifted from being a receiver during the Kennedy administration to the status of donor-state during the Johnson and Nixon presidencies. This shift reflected the consolidation of the Shah's position not only as an indispensable Western ally in security, but also as a stabilizing force for production and marketing of oil to the West and Israel. Moreover, the rise in oil prices helped make Iran an open market all sorts of military, commercial, and consumer products. The United States, along with Britain, France, and even the Soviet Union, found it difficult to resist the increasing oil revenues. For instance, *The New York Times* reported: "The Defense Department hopes to ease its troublesome cost problems with a new Navy fighter plane, the F-14 Tomcat, by selling some of them to Iran and perhaps to allies in Europe such as West Germany."<sup>161</sup> Some Pentagon official considered the shah's insistence on acquiring so much sophisticated military equipment as a psychological obsession rather than an actual security threat from either Iran's Arab neighbors or the Soviet Union.<sup>162</sup>

As a result of the Shah's consolidation of power, a shift arose in the perception of Iran. In 1966, the Johnson administration went as far as declaring Iran a "developed nation" that no longer needed American aid.<sup>163</sup> This representation became a dominant theme in the U.S. media.

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<sup>159</sup> Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations*, pp. 19-40.

<sup>160</sup> John W. Finney, "Pentagon Hoping Iran Will Buy F-14sr: Able to Intrude," *New York Times*, Thursday, July 19, 1973.

<sup>161</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, p. 96.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>163</sup> Zonis, *The Political Elite of Iran*, pp. 18-79.

For example, the title of a report in *The New York Times* read: “Economic Reforms Are Transforming Iran: Officials Turn to Industry.” The piece argued, “Perhaps nowhere else in the Middle East have such broad, basic steps been taken in quest of economic progress as in Iran.” This shift in the perception of Iran also translated into policy changes. Iran was re-classified as a politically stable, developed, and progressive state. A year before the 1979 revolution, President Carter announced that Iran was “an island of stability” in a troubled region.” Constitutive of this classification was muting or ignoring the widening gap between the official state representation and those of the contending discourses.<sup>164</sup>

The state-elites also believed that Iran was an island of stability and development. For example, Jahangir Amouzegar, Iran’s influential finance minister during the 1970s, published a book titled *Iran: An Economic Profile*. As the regime was deeply alienated from its own society and on the verge of a revolution, Amouzegar boasted about the unprecedented rapid growth and political stability in Iran, which he mainly attributed to the sound and determined policies of Mohamad Reza Shah:

Iran’s remarkable economic growth, political stability and social progress in recent years are considered one of the world’s outstanding success stories. The record is particularly striking because of its short time span. . . . In fact, in the 1960-1976 period, Iran [has] experienced what is likely to be recorded by future historians as one of the most rapid and most fundamental socio-economic transformations in modern times. A fortuitous combination of farsighted leadership, internal political stability, improved developmental planning, increasingly educated people, newly discovered and better utilized natural resources—and the indispensable rise in oil revenues.<sup>165</sup>

In his book, Amouzegar argued, “The national policies formulated within the framework of the 17-point ‘Revolution of the Shah and the People’ have produced equally interesting

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<sup>164</sup> For example, see Amuzegar, *Iran: An Economic Profile*, ix-xiii.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

results.”<sup>166</sup> Next, he contended that in this “new cultural and industrial transformation,” the shah has been the source of guidance for developing an “economic democracy,” redistributing “the national income,” providing “free education,” subsidizing “nutrition,” and enfranchising women.<sup>167</sup> Finally, he chronicled “policies and programs for Iran’s recent achievements” in economic development.<sup>168</sup> Iran’s economic growth, represented as structural and positive changes, was improving the standard of living and creating political stability. Although structural changes were observed in Iran, they turned out not to be interpreted as positive or good by others.

As for structural changes, the academic knowledge—produced by many of the experts on Iran—showed the much rapid structural changes in Iran. For example, Afsaneh Najmabadi, who documented the consequences of the state land reform, argued that by the mid-1960s, the result of the shah’s land reform caused irreversible institutional changes in the commercialization and monetarization of rural production, distribution, and consumption. She demonstrated how peasants became paid workers—whether they migrated to cities or remained in rural areas.<sup>169</sup> She contended that capitalist relations of production penetrated deep into Iran’s remaining enclaves of traditional society. Moreover, Richard Elliot Benedict, who researched the capital markets in Iran, documented the transformation of traditional system of Bazaar-based credit and finance to state-controlled and regulated industrial crediting and financing.<sup>170</sup> In other words, the state became the major source of credit and financing, as well as the largest landowner, industrial

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Najmabadi, *Land Reform and Social Change in Iran*, pp. 101-102, p. 136, pp. 130-136.

<sup>169</sup> Richard Elliot Benedick, *Industrial Finance in Iran; a Study of Financial Practice in an Underdeveloped Economy* (Boston,: Division of Research Graduate School of Business Administration Harvard University, 1964).

<sup>170</sup> Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations*, p. 3.



and agriculture producer, and consumer. In addition to becoming the largest employer in the country, the state became the largest source of promoting education, the gatekeeper for receiving education, and decider in the content of knowledge for the educational system. By the 1970s, the state financed 70,000 students in state-owned universities in addition to financing even a larger number of students in various Western educational systems. In fact, among the Near Eastern countries, Iran sent a higher percentage of its student population abroad than any other country in the region.<sup>171</sup> Additionally, while the state maintained its traditional economic monopolies, such as imports, exports, transportation, roads, airlines, cements, steel, tobacco, the state also began to tightly regulate and control licensing of small and large businesses.

In short, notwithstanding their differences, the media and epistemic community in the United States, as well as Iranian state-elites, agreed that the shah-centered policies were drastically transforming the lifestyle of Iranians, but according to a particular vision that perceived the shah as the cause of not only regional security but also “domestic stability.”<sup>172</sup> Constitutive of knowledge was, however, a total disconnect between the state version of realities and those interpreted and understood from the prism of contending discourses. These discourses represented Mohamad Reza Shah as the “Servant of America.” For socialists, the shah was serving the interests of capitalist America. For nationalists, the shah was serving the interest of foreign powers, which by then happened to be America rather than Britain. For Islamists, the shah was serving the interest of non-Muslim America out to destroy Islam.

During this time, Ayatollah Khomeini, who had been released from prison for calling the Shah’s White Revolution un-Islamic and branding him as the cheap servant of America, once

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<sup>171</sup> Minister of Science and Higher Education, “Statistics Concerning Iranian Students in Iran,” (Tehran 1970), pp. 74-75.

<sup>172</sup> Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, pp. 181-188.

more attacked the shah for selling Iran's independence "to our masters," the Americans. Khomeini blamed the shah for "destroying Iranian dignity," for reducing "the Iranian people to a level lower than that of an American dog."<sup>173</sup> For this speech, the shah deported Khomeini. In less than three months, in January 1965, an Islamic militant killed the prime minister, Ali Mansur. In the same year, a faction of the banned National Front formed the *Mujtahedin-e Khalq-e Iran* (MKI), an Islamic militant group, whose aim was to overthrow the shah—that "American servant."<sup>174</sup> In April 1965, a socialist militant attempted to assassinate the shah because "the shah was serving the interest of American capitalism."<sup>175</sup> In the same year, the *Fadaian-e Khalq*, another group of Marxist militants, was formed. Its goal was to overthrow the Shah—that "American Servant and the Hired Hand of Capitalists." Interestingly, the words *Mujtahedin* and *Fadaian* (fighters and devotees) are both rooted in the Islamic concept of *jihad* in a struggle of Self against the Others—the non-believers, the foreign capitalists, and foreign dominators.

Although the meaning of serving the interest of America fundamentally differed from one group to the next, a unity existed in both words and deeds. The shah was represented as the "Servant of America," a represent that continued until the fall of the regime. In deeds, because of the state's effective suppression of all voices of opposition, nationalists, socialists, and Islamists became united in their stand against the regime. They all began to call for the violent overthrow of the regime. This was a fundamental shift. In the early 1960s, only modern Islamists were calling for the overthrow of the regime, the changing of the constitutional monarchy, and the

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<sup>173</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, pp. 489-491.

<sup>174</sup> Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations*, pp. 161-163.

<sup>175</sup> Ansari, *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Next Great Crisis in the Middle East*, p. 59.

return to Self. By 1965, all contending discourses were united in both words and deeds. This transformation was the beginning of the construction of a hegemony, which eventually caused the implosion of the regime.

However, the Shah's construction of reality had already created a political space in which he failed to imagine, comprehend, or even give credence to the legitimacy of those who resisted his rule. Instead, he aggrandized his own power as absolute, invincible, and divine. He continued to physically repress his opponents brutally as if the physical repression or destruction of opponents would also destroy their social reality. He was unaware that the very act of repression helped create an image that symbolized various degrees of foreignness for contending discourses. In other words, the social reality for the state and contending discourses were different. While the state saw itself as a developed nation-state, contending discourses interpreted Iran as a state owned by foreigners. With time, this gap was widening despite Iran's tremendous economic growth according to the official state metrics.

In 1971, for example, the Shah celebrated the 2,500 years of Iranian monarchy. Rather arbitrarily, he changed the Islamic-based calendar and selected Cyrus as the founder of Iranian monarchy and set up a new monarchic-based calendar. As expected, this act offended Islamists, who represented this action as another sign of the regime's foreignness. Others argued that if the Iranian monarchy had begun prior to Cyrus, then why should Cyrus be the founder of Iranian monarchy? For the state-elites and the Shah, the logic of selecting Cyrus was obvious. Intertextually, Cyrus was construed as a great Persian conqueror, based on Greek historians such as Herodotus and not any known Iranian record or research. Ali Ansari put this reconstruction of

history aptly: “In starting the national clock from the Ancient Persia (Ackaemenid) Empire, Mohammad Reza Shah was paradoxically paying lip service to a Western historiography.”<sup>176</sup>

In addition to starting a new calendar, the Shah invited an impressive number of world leaders, including Vice President Spiro Agnew. According to Ansari, the occasion drew tremendous attention to the Shah and his economic, military, and political achievements in the foreign press along with “the prying eyes of human rights groups and other non-governmental organization.”<sup>177</sup> In Iran, the representation of this celebration was the same. While the official media declared that Iran had reached the “Gate of a Great Civilization,” contending discourses represented the event as the travesty of justice.

In the opening of his speech in front of a large gathering of world dignitaries, the Shah addressed Cyrus directly from a location not too far from Cyrus’s tomb. He declared, “Cyrus, rest in peace because we [present Iranians] are awake.” The shah’s statement assumed a continuing historical consciousness between Cyrus and Mohamad Reza Shah in particular, and the shah of Iran and the people of Iran in general. But in contending discourses, the speech produced a variety of popular parodies and political texts that undermined the Shah’s legitimacy. Additionally, reports of the Shah spending millions of dollars for flying food from Maxim’s of Paris while many Iranians were starving entered the common language.<sup>178</sup> From 1971 to 1976, the Shah’s alienation from his own society increased.

On February 20, 1975, shifting from the representation logic of a two-party system, Mohamad Reza Shah banned the two officially sanctioned political parties—the People’s Party

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, pp. 168-175.

<sup>178</sup> Asgar Saremi Shohab, *The Rastakhiz Party of Iranian Nation According to the Documents* 2vols., vol. 1 (Tehran: The Center for Islamic Revolution Documents, 2006/1386).

and Party of New Iran—and ordered the formation of a single party called Hizb-i Rastakhiz-e Melat-e Iran (Resurrection Party of the Iranian Nation).<sup>179</sup> Previously, the Shah had boasted that Iran’s two-party system was similar to those of advanced democracies where one party ruled and the other one played the role of a loyal opposition.<sup>180</sup> He had once argued:

So I consider that my role as King requires that I encourage parties. If I were a dictator rather than a constitutional monarch, then I might be tempted to sponsor a single dominant party such as Hitler organized or such as you find today in Communist countries. But as constitutional monarch I can afford to encourage large-scale party activity free from the straitjacket of one-party rule or the one-party state.<sup>181</sup>

However, in 1975, he began arguing that the time for performative puppet shows are over, and only those loyal to him are considered “true” Iranians:

A person who does not become a member of this new political organization has two choices. Such a person belongs to either an illegal organization or the illegal Tudeh Party, both of which in other words mean such a person is traitor whose place is in one of Iran’s prisons. However, such a person can leave the country and go anywhere he may want without even paying exit-taxes. Because such a person is not an Iranian and thus not a part of this nation, therefore his-her activities are illegal and punishable by law.<sup>182</sup>

In this text and similar texts, the Shah was beginning to demand not only loyalty, but faithful commitment to the regime. For example, the preamble of the Resurrection Party charter read:

As our leader [Mohamad Reza Shah] has guided us, all Iranian adults who have faith in, and commitment to, the monarchic order, the constitution, and the people-shah’s revolution can participate in this Party, but all those with anti-Iranian thought or sympathy or those who threaten the security and order of Iran cannot be a member of this Party or the nation.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Mohammed Reza, *Mission for My Country*, p. 172.

<sup>180</sup> For an argument in favor of a two party system, see *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>181</sup> Shohab, *The Rastakhiz Party of Iranian Nation According to the Documents* p. 35.

<sup>182</sup> Mohammad Reza Shah’s radio speech on February 23, 1975, quoted in *Ibid.*, v. 1, p. 187, document No. 110.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, document No. 88, v.81, p. 85.

Simply stated, the Shah constructed a particular political space that defined the parameters of what were considered security or insecurity, lawful or unlawful activities, Islamic or non-Islamic, and divine or secular. However, the very nature of these classifications constituted the way they were interpreted and practiced. In my comparative analysis of these values for the state, there were two categories: the official category that the state enforced, and the non-official category that the state repressed.

For example, in its repressive campaign to justify the official state party, the state frightened the people to join the *Rastakhiz* Party. According to the party record, by 1978, the party announced that it had 78,249 local chapters and more than 5 million members.<sup>184</sup> To distinguish members from non-members, various versions of coat pins were given to state employees, sycophants, and opportunists. Wearing pins became the performative act of loyalty and a sign of submission to the regime.

Meanwhile, the act of joining was a delegitimizing act in the same way the wearing of European hats or clothing had once become a performative symbol of loyalty to the shah-centered state during Reza Shah. Ayatollah Khomeini announced that this Party, much like previously state organized and funded parties, was an illegitimate, illegal, criminal, and an imperialistic design. Participation in it was therefore against Islamic values.<sup>185</sup>

Within the context of contending discourses, the Shah's consolidation of power delegitimized him even more. The official state texts represented performative acts of showing loyalty to the regime as a symbol of loyalty to the divine authority of the Shah. But the

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>185</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini's speeches, vol. 2, 149-150, also quoted in Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, p. 212.

contending discourses re-represented his claim to the absolute divinity as arrogance, despotism, and arbitrary rule of a monarch out of touch with the realities of his own society.

Of course, for nationalists and socialists, the very idea of divine sovereignty was a pre-modern concept associated with despotism. Hence, they easily rejected it. But for modern Islamists who valued the concept of divine sovereignty, re-representing the Shah's claim to divine sovereignty was more sophisticated. Islamists first devalued secularism as an imperialistic design and then argued that the Shah was the agent of U.S. imperialism who falsely claimed divinity for himself. In other words, while the very concept of divinity was valued, the Shah's claim was re-represented as illegitimate and false.

In a speech delivered in the city of Najaf in January 1978, Khomeini argued that the people have identified "the Shah as the criminal" agent responsible for all "the miseries of Iranian people."<sup>186</sup> He then claimed that the Prophet Mohammad had predicted that Qum would become the center of dissemination of the divine knowledge for an Islamic movement. This divine knowledge supposedly would mobilize "the faithful soldiers of Islam" and would end "all the suffering that we have suffered." Khomeini blamed the leaders of those countries who have signed the Declaration of Human Rights, but at all times have denied man his freedom."<sup>187</sup> Accordingly, "The U.S. is one of those countries . . . [which] has committed crime against man." He listed these criminal acts and argued that one of these criminal acts had been "imposing this Shah upon us . . . [who] has transformed Iran into an official colony of the U.S. What crimes he has committed in service of his masters!"<sup>188</sup> Having represented the shah as a U.S. servant, and the United States as a criminal international entity, Khomeini began to devalue the very concept

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

of secularism in relation of the “true” human “freedom.” He represented this true human freedom as both political and religious in opposition to U.S. imperialism. Referring to America, Britain, and the Soviet Union, he declared:

The imperialists know full well how active religious scholars, and what an active militant religion Islam is. . . . So for several centuries they propagated that religion must be separated from politics. Some of our *akhunds* [Shi’i clerics] came to believe it and began asking, ‘What business do we have with politics?’ The posing of the question means abandonment of Islam.<sup>189</sup>

In short, Khomeini first linked secularism with imperialism, colonialism, criminality, and the shah. Then he argued that Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad were divine political leaders, not merely religious preachers:

Look at Moses (upon whom be peace). He was a simple shepherd: he stood alone with his staff against the Pharaoh who was claiming divinity. These people, too—the Shah and his gang—would like to claim divinity for themselves, but they realize there would be no takers for their claim. But if we were to relax our vigilance, he too would say, “I am your lord, the most high.” There have always been people who made these absurd claims, and there always will be.<sup>190</sup>

In Khomeini’s representation, the Shah was not only a criminal, but also an imposter claimant to divine sovereignty, and the depiction of the Shah as an imposter claimant was opposite to the representation of the state.

By 1976, while the state international power and prestige had reached its highest point, its power to communicate with its own society hit bottom. The official state language was different from what the state intended. In this era, while the Shah made the cover of the *Time* as the “Emperor of Oil” whom the editor compared with the greatness and the power of “Cyrus the Great,” contending discourses understood Mohamad Reza Shah as the cause of dislocation,

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., pp. 220-221.

<sup>190</sup> Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran*, p. 142.



unemployment, inflation, regressive taxation, high prices, loss of morals, and shanty towns.<sup>191</sup>

Additionally, notwithstanding their differences, contending discourses represented Mohamad Reza Shah as the loyal “Servant of America” and America as the main foreign enemy in Iran.

#### **Part IV: The Collapse of the State and the Rise of Modern Islam**

As the power and prestige of the state increased, so did its repressive intolerance for all contending discourses. The intolerance of the regime created a condition of conceivability in which all contending discourses imagined Mohamad Reza Shah as the reactionary “Servant of America” or its equivalent of “hired-hand” (*muzdour*), “puppet,” “stooge,” “agent,” and so forth. Within this political space were two opposing interpretations of social realities: the official and unofficial interpretations of the state policies and practices. So great was the divide between these two social realities that no event appeared to be occurring in the same temporal or geographic space. For example, in summer of 1978, a group of previously unknown militant groups set a movie theater on fire. More than 400 people died in that act of arson. Without any concrete evidence, the state immediately blamed Islamic groups for the arson, while all contending identities did the opposite. For example, Ayatollah Khomeini declared:

I have not yet been informed of all the details, but what is certain is that this inhumane act, contrary to all the laws of Islam, cannot have been committed by the opponents of the Shah. . . . Proof indicates, and the bereaved people declare, that the cinema in Abadan was set on fire by the criminal Shah and his government.<sup>192</sup>

Economic issues were also interpreted in the same way. For example, the oil shock of mid-1974 caused a sudden reduction in Iran’s oil revenue as the prices of imported goods drastically

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<sup>191</sup> For displacement see Robert E. Looney, *Economic Origins of the Iranian Revolution*, Pergamon Policy Studies on International Development. (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982). Also see Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 497. For rent increases, see Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, pp. 231-235.

<sup>192</sup> Amjad, *Iran: From Royal Dictatorship to Theocracy*, p. 92.

increased. These events caused a credit shortage, unemployment, and inflation.<sup>193</sup> The common theme among Islamists, nationalists, and socialists was that the Shah and the United States had conspired and caused the adverse economic conditions in Iran.<sup>194</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini declared:

What happened to all that money? Is our country poor? Our country has an ocean of oil. It has iron; it has precious metals. Iran is a rich country. But those so-called friends of humanity [the Americans] have appointed their agents to rule this country in order to prevent the poor from benefiting from its riches.”<sup>195</sup>

In contrast, the Shah blamed the economic crises on the merchant class and imposed a punishing price and income control on the middle class, which bore the brunt of the austerity measures the state imposed.<sup>196</sup>

Meanwhile, as the power of the state to communicate its message waned, the shah began another round of “reforms.” His measures were, however, too little and too late. From 1977, whatever the state did or did not do was interpreted in a negative light. He charged Amir Abbas Hoveyda with fraud and mismanagement.<sup>197</sup> Hoveyda had held the post of prime minister more than 12 years and was one of the most loyal sycophants of Mohamad Reza Shah, an ideal “yes man” whom the Shah tolerated. But the firing of Hoveyda and talk of reform were understood according to an opposing social reality that re-represented the shah’s effort to reform as another scheme devised by his new American master, Jimmy Carter, who wanted to deceive Iranians

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<sup>193</sup> For example, while Iran was a creditor from 1973 to 1974, it sought an international loan in 1977. See Ibid., pp. 81-102.

<sup>194</sup> See Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, pp. 223-224.

<sup>195</sup> Looney, *Economic Origins of the Iranian Revolution*, pp. 3-5.

<sup>196</sup> Keddie and Richard, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, p. 217. Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran*, p. 131, p. 171, p. 270. Abbas Milani, *The Persian Sphinx: Amir Abbas Hoveyda and the Riddle of the Iranian Revolution*, 1st ed. (Washington, D.C.: Mage Publishers, 2000).

<sup>197</sup> Hoveyda was kept under arrest without a hearing until he was executed immediately after the revolution, see Habib Ladjevardi, *Memoir of Fatemeh Pakravan*, Iranian Oral History Project (Center for Middle Eastern Studies of Harvard University, 1998; reprint, IBEX, Inc.), p. 123.

with another campaign of human rights. By 1977, the rhetoric of human rights in Iran was linked to a different narrative from those in the United States.

Meanwhile, inflicted with cancer, Mohamad Reza Shah was loosening his personal grip. The Shah, who had previously boasted about his micro-management of affairs in Iran, began to delegate more authority and less involvement. It appeared that the core of the shah-centered state was disappearing. As the regime was collapsing, Fatemeh Pakravan, the wife of the chief counselor to the shah—General Hassan Pakravan, complained, “You know, we don’t have one shah. . . . We have at least twelve of them. And the weakest is the one who wears the crown.”<sup>198</sup> Indeed, as the shah began to appear weak to his own supporters as well as his opponents, the myth of the shah as an absolute and invincible ruler—backed by the United States as the most powerful nation in history—began to collapse. The very narrow circle around the shah began to diminish rapidly. The best sign of this reduced inner circle was how the state-elites began to send their families out of the country. Mrs. Pakravan, whose husband had once headed the powerful SAVAK and had actually arrested and deported Khomeini back in 1964, was urging her husband to leave the country before it was too late.<sup>199</sup> The free fall of the Shah’s regime had begun. This free fall speeded up after the shah returned from a visit to the United States in November 1977.

During the Shah’s visit, the confederation of Iranian Students Association organized a protest in front of the White House. Duplicating what the state normally had done in Iran, that is, organizing state-sponsored demonstrations while banning all other protests, the Iranian regime bussed in the Iranian military cadets studying in the United States to cheer the shah’s arrival. The result was an inevitable clash between the pro-shah and anti-shah protestors in front of the White

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, p. 229.

House. To restore order, the police had to resort to tear gas, which blew over to where Mohamad Reza Shah and President Carter, accompanied by their wives and dignitaries, stood before the press corps. With tears running down their faces, the press corps was busy taking pictures. Within a few hours, Mohamad Reza Shah's image, as he was wiping his tears off his face, reached Iran. The once seemingly invincible shah of Iran, whose secret police had scared people to submission, appeared to be a weak, feeble, and frail man broken by a few hundred students. Suddenly, the aura of invincibility was totally gone.<sup>200</sup> A few days later, the Association of Iranian Writers held a 10-day public event, which attracted thousands of people. The mere holding of a public event was a turning point in the collapse of the regime. From then on, it appeared that the public no longer feared the regime even though the regime's terror tactics had not yet changed. It seemed that the very nature of understanding fear of punishment had disappeared. At the same time, Ayatollah Khomeini, backed by the Shi'i clerical establishment and supported by nationalists, socialists, and individual activists, began to speak in a deterministic voice. In the discourse, Mohamad Reza Shah was represented as though he was already defeated.

For example, in his message to the people of Tabriz, a city in northern Iran, Khomeini represented the Shah as a savage, a brute, and a criminal agent of America whose military, police, and secret police were not only beatable, but also weak. He wrote: "Now, after the criminal massacres and bloodshed that have taken place in Tabriz, a few SAVAK agents have been sent into streets in different parts of the country."<sup>201</sup> This representation of SAVAK is different from former representations. Previously, SAVAK was represented as an omnipotent

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<sup>200</sup> Eye-witness to the event of November 1977.

<sup>201</sup> Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, pp. 229-230.

entity with eyes and ears everywhere. Now, SAVAK was being represented as an organization with few numbers and the Shah as weak and feeble. After criticizing the Shah for his brutality, Khomeini declared:

In any event, he [Mohamad Reza Shah] must realize it is too late; the people of Iran have chosen their path and they will not rest until they have overthrown these criminals and avenged themselves and their fathers on this bloodthirsty family. . . . The religious leader will hoist the banner of Islam to exact vengeance on the Zuhhak.<sup>202</sup>

In this text, Khomeini spoke from a position of strength. He promised vengeance as he became the natural leader of the people. Similarly, socialists and nationalists represented the Shah as a weak, feeble, and childish monarch whose main aim was to serve the interest of the United States and continue his illegitimate, unjust, and despotic monarchy.

Ayatollah Khomeini repeated this theme in various speeches. His speeches were widely distributed throughout the country by cassette tapes. When Khomeini simply announced, “The king must go [the shah *bayad baravad*],” he sounded as though it would have been unnatural if Mohamad Reza Shah remained in power. By then, it had become “unrealistic” to imagine that the Shah could remain in power or even keep his crown.

When the regime imposed a martial law, the move was represented as further weakness of the Shah, and defying the regime became a game. When the military declared a night curfew, Khomeini ordered the people to go onto their rooftops and recite Allah-oh Akbar. Although this phrase means “God is Great,” and it had been mostly used and understood as a call for prayer, it suddenly became a sign of defiance that invoked calling for justice, equality, independence, and freedom. It also invoked a sense of freedom from fear or a sense of eternal invincibility, which had nothing to do with organized religion or faith. In my in-depth interviews with participants,

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<sup>202</sup> Mehdi Mohsenian-rad, *Revolution, Press, and Values* (Tehran: The Organization for Documents and Records of Islamic Revolution 1375/1996), p. 197. By referring to the shah as the *Zuhhak* of the time, Khomeini invoked the Persian myth of an ancient unjust ruler who fed human brains to his two serpents grown on his shoulder. Accordingly, the people, led by Kaveh the blacksmith, revolted and avenged themselves.

they all expressed a feeling of empowerment to hear thousands of voices defying what had been previously conceived as an invincible force with various means of terrorizing the people. This new meaning of “God is Great” became a social call for action, which was signified by Islam—but it was not necessarily Islamic.

Suddenly, the power to reproduce the state was reduced to almost nothing. By August 1978, the print media, which up to that point had reflected the official state discourse, went on national strike. The state could not broadcast its messages any longer. Even the state-owned National Radio and Television station went almost silent, and the military was forced to take over its operation. But the broadcasting media effectively remained silent because Khomeini ordered the people to turn off their radios and televisions for a time. Most people followed his order. As though that was not enough to mute the state, workers in charge of the electrical grid frequently triggered a blackout at exactly 8 p.m., which was the traditional time for the radio and television news hour.<sup>203</sup>

In contrast to the state, the representational power of the people increased. In repeated cycles of street demonstrations, the previously muted voices of the people reduced the ominous power of tanks and troops into seemingly innocuous toys chasing young boys in the streets. In a live or die game of hide and seek, tanks and troops, which had previously frightened the people, became entertaining tools for the young people. The environment was jubilant and festive.<sup>204</sup> And most slogans and writing on the walls praised Ayatollah Khomeini while they denounced the shah.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>204</sup> In-depth interviews with participants.

<sup>205</sup> Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, p. 266.

Upon his return to Iran on February 2, 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini addressed the largest crowd ever gathered in Tehran during any time in history. This gathering occurred when Khomeini had no official command or control over any means of power except his words. And with words, he authoritatively belittled the government. He declared: “I will slap this government in the mouth with the support of the people and by virtue of the acceptance the people have granted me.”<sup>206</sup> While he was invoking “the people”—in the same way Mussadiq had done—he was presenting himself not as a “Man of the People,” as Mussadiq had done, but as a “Man of God” for the people. In other words, Khomeini was a man chosen by the people, but he based his legitimacy not on the people’s will or laws but on God’s will and laws. On the occasion of the formal declaration of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which was held April 1, 1979, Khomeini announced:

This day of Farfardin 12 is the first day of God’s government, and it is to be one of our foremost religious and national festivals . . . for it is the day on which the battlement of tyrannical government crumbled, a satanic power deported forever and the government of the oppressed, which is the government of God—was established in its place.<sup>207</sup>

In a referendum held April 2, 1979, the people were asked to vote on whether or not they wanted to establish an Islamic Republic. The overwhelming majority of the people voted “yes” without knowing any details of what an Islamic state meant or could do. But the overwhelming majority believed that it would be good because the new state-elites were promising it, and the people believed them.

On December 5, 1979, the headline of *Kayhan*, the largest newspaper in Iran, read: “The Government Will Transfer the Ownership of 70 Thousand Homes in 195 Cities.”<sup>208</sup> Some elites

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<sup>206</sup> Khomeini’s first speech in Iran, delivered at Behsht-e Zahra. See Ibid., p.259.

<sup>207</sup> Mohsenian-rad, *Revolution, Press, and Values*, pp. 271-280.

<sup>208</sup> Keyhan No. 10872 on 12/05/1979, p. 1

were encouraging the people to take it upon themselves to redistribute the wealth of the country, and some actually rushed to do so, mostly in forms of taking over lands, vacant homes, and rental homes. A week later, *Kayhan* quoted Ayatollah Khosrow-shahi: “Do not Purchase any Houses, We Make Everyone Homeowner.”<sup>209</sup> In other words, the new state-elites were promising values previously constructed by socialists—the distribution of wealth—as a part of the Islamic state.<sup>210</sup> In fact, wealth—as a social symbol of power and prestige—began to become an anti-value. The new state-elites, for example, Mehdi Bazargan, the prime minister of the provisional government, refused to use the state-owned limousines. Instead, he took the extremely crowded city bus to go to his office. In his first official act as the chief editor of the *Islamic Republic Newspaper*, Abul Hassan Bani Sadr, who eventually became the first president of the Islamic Republic, redecorated his office by ordering chairs, desks, counters, and stools to be thrown out. Journalists working in the first official state newspaper were forced to work on the floor. Interestingly, this act was interpreted as a sign of being humble and thus Islamic. In the first assembly of the state-elites in the constitutional assembly held in the Majlis, Ayatollah Taleqani, who was considered the second highest ranking official at the time, refused to sit on a chair, so he sat on the floor next to the podium. The new state-elites represented these practices as Islamic humbleness linked to the oppressed, weak, and poor people (*mustazafin*), constructed in oppositional relation with the wealth and arrogance of unbelievers (*mustakberian*). Not surprising, the United States was referred to as the “world arrogant power” (*estekbar johani*).

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<sup>209</sup> Kehyan No. 10878 on 12/12/1979

<sup>210</sup> As the result, a new wave of migration rushed to major cities. In less than a year, Tehran’s population reached 6 million. The problem of unplanned urban development was exacerbated.



Once again articles of clothing became a part of political identity. The state-elites refused to wear ties as the symbol of modernism association with *garbzadegi* (West-struckness). Although wearing Western-style suits and pants remained as the standard norm for men's dress code, ironed pants, shined shoes, short sleeves, long collars, expensive materials, shaved faces, shiny colors, or whatever else was deemed showy or fashionable became un-Islamic. The state also ordered all female employees to wear *hejab* (the complete covering of one's hair and body). Eventually, the order applied to all women in Iran, even to non-Iranian visitors such as foreign journalists. In addition to the dress code, alcohol, drugs, music, dating, theater, and all practices imagined as Western were banned as anti-Islamic values.<sup>211</sup> In brief, with the collapse of the Shah's regime, modern Islamists officialized the discourse of modern Islam. Modern Islam was embedded in all the existential values, concepts, and narratives previously constructed in the context of Iranian contending discourses, but in a new meaning.

### **Conclusion**

During the tumultuous period of 1953 to 1979, by signifying security and development, the official state discourse represented Mohamad Reza Shah as a divine sovereign who was expected to provide security, develop the nation, uphold the law, and enforce the will of the people, as well as spread justice and Islamic ethics. Constitutive of the official state discourse was the significance of six sub-discourses that all modern Iranian political discourses share, although each according to a different interpretation of an ideal nation-state and values. The shah-centered state represented itself (a) as the divine sovereign who provided security for his people; (b) as the leader who modernized Iran to supposedly become as civilized as the West; (c) as the ruler who governed according to Western bureaucratic norms and rationality; (d) as the leader who

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<sup>211</sup> Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, pp. 200-208.

followed the people's mandate as Western democracies did; (e) as the ruler who emphasized redistribution of wealth and land as socialist values; and (f) as the shah who appealed to Islamic myths and narratives as a good Muslim would do.

The logic behind these representations was, however, the relational linkages and differences that existed in the language since the 1905 constitutional revolution. In other words, these six signifiers—security, progress, law, democracy, socioeconomic justice, and Islamic ethics—constituted the social content of all contending discourses, although each with a different interpretation of Iranian and its main Others. In the official state discourse during this era, the shah was construed as the embodiment of the Iranian sovereignty or security, progress, law, people, justice, and good Islamic ethics. Constitutive of this Self was the construction of Other whom the state represented as international communists, negative nationalists, and Islam fanatics.

In this chapter, I reviewed four eras in which the state represented and re-represented itself in shifting relations with its main Others. Accordingly, by signifying the threat of communism, the state terrorized the opposition into submission. Although the state succeeded in the physical elimination of the opposition, it failed to mute their voices of reform. Then the state adopted Kennedy's reform as the revolution of the shah and the people. While this act robbed socialists and nationalists of their agendas and consolidated Mohamad Reza Shah's power, it energized modern Islamists to go into action. Next, the convergence of specific historical conditions produced by rising oil revenues, Iran's structural transformation, and the acquiescence of the United States, along with the shah-centered policies, helped consolidate Mohamad Reza Shah's power. In the official state discourse, while the shah essentially became the manifestation of power and glory, in the contending discourse, he became the embodiment of foreignness,

although the very meaning of “foreign” differed for contending discourses. For socialists, the shah was a foreign agent of capitalists. For nationalists, the shah was the foreign agent of foreign domination. For Islamists, the shah was the foreign agent of non-Islamic oppression and domination. Finally, at the peak of Mohamad Reza Shah’s apparent power, he began to lose his representational power. In a hegemony constructed in opposition to the Shah, he was devalued. In unison, the opposition to the Shah re-represented him as an illegitimate, despotic, unjust, un-Islamic, and the servant of the United States. Even the Shah’s most expensive institutional instruments, the military, police, bureaucracy, and media, began to reflect values embedded and constructed in the hegemonic representation of the Shah as a foreign agent. In sum, for the fifth time since the constitutional revolution, a fundamental social revolution occurred, and this one happened—as the rest did—when a temporary hegemony was constructed against the official state discourse.

## CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

I began this dissertation with a question. How did the Iranian state elites imagine, interpret, and practice the politics of nation-state building in modern Iran? I also asked a series of questions. Why did so many people—within and outside of Iran, in and out of government—dismiss the possibility of an Islamic revolution or the establishment of an Islamic state? Could it be that competing ways of imagining Iran had produced competing social realities with different sets of presuppositions, preferences, interests, and mode of rationalities? If so, what were the social content of these competing realities? Most significantly, if competing ways of imagining Iran produced competing social realities, how did they shape the politics of Iran?

These questions were at the heart of my dissertation, and answering them required a surveying of Iran's political development from the perspective of its state elites. In this spirit, my dissertation made a historical narrative of political development in modern Iran. It reached back to texts written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and compared with those written later. It argued that four previously non-existent signifying words—"development," "law," "democracy," and "class-equality"—entered the political language of the state elites. By the 1900s, these four words together with the two traditional words of "security" and Islam existed in competing political discourses. I have called these six words the basic political signifiers in the politics of Iran because they have existed in not only the common political language of modern Iran, but also in its contending political discourses, and each basic signifier has been signiassociated with a different set of meanings, concepts, themes, and modes of rationalities. Depending upon the hierarchic formation of these six signifiers into an official state discourse or discourses of those opposing the state, different interpretation of social reality and idealization of Iran were constructed. Each "imagined" Iran produced a particular social reality and the conditions of

possibility for producing a set of presuppositions, preferences, interests, and mode of rationalities, and each set of social reality was incapable of fully interpreting the others.

I argued that the main body of the literature on Iran interprets modernity and tradition as fixed categorical constructs. The literature interpret meanings, concepts, themes, and rationalities associated with the six basic signifiers of Iran by first categorizing them into modern and traditional and then interpreting them according to Western conceptualization of modernity and tradition. This predominant ontological assumption, which assumes the particularity of Western political development as a universal model for all spaces and time, drives the presupposition of research designs that value either modernity or tradition. As such, theories are constructed to measure either success or failures of modernity. The literature focuses on false consciousness, ideology, mistakes, misperception, irrationality, and misunderstanding of history to explain the political development of modern Iran. Embedded in fixed and ideological framework, the literature was not able to describe, assess, or analyze Iran as it was imagined by millions of the people. I argue that the same is true for describing, assessing, and analyzing today's Iran.

In contrast, starting with Charles Taylor's interpretative approach and inspired by some elements of Foucault's articulation of discourses, I attempted to analyze Iran's political development by interpreting how the state elites understood their own social realities in two different ways.

First, I made a narration of political development in modern Iran. In this narration, I showed competing idealization of the state elites in Iran. Second, I made some brief textual analysis of the state elites. In those analyses, I revealed some important aspects of the relational linkages and differences among basic signifiers in contending official state discourses. I showed by understanding the social content of political discourses, the politics of nation-state building in

Iran and how the state elites interpreted the meaning of security, development, law, democracy, people, and Islam can be described and analyzed. I described how contending political discourses constituted the interpretation of the politics of nation-state building in Iran during the Pahlavi dynasty.

In my narration and analysis, with an eye on critical political events, social trends, and shifts in the changing meanings of concepts, themes, and rationalities, I examined a variety of political and non-political texts dating from pre-modern to modern times. I identified six basic signifiers that have shown up in all contending political discourses in Iran, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, but with different hierarchic formations.

My analysis of pre-modern texts revealed that for centuries the mode of governance was based on two basic signifiers of security and Islam. Each produced and reproduced its own respective institution and acted with a certain degree of autonomy from one another. However, together, they formed the political discourse of “monarchic absolutism” whose formation did not fundamentally change, and the meaning of its policies and practices were interpreted as inevitable, natural, and divine. In the premodern political arrangement in Iran, Islamic jurists did not have a claim on the state or the government and preached that the monarchic political order was indeed a divine political order that provided security for Muslims. Because of Iran’s encounter with the West, the discourse of monarch absolutism collapsed, and the meanings, themes, and rationalities associated with it changed.

My analysis of modern texts revealed that in addition to the two traditional signifiers—security and Islam—constituting the Iranian discourse of monarchic absolutism, four new signifiers and many concepts, themes, and rationality associated with them entered the language. These signifiers were law or constitutionalism, modernism or development, people, democracy,

citizenship, or nationalism, class equality, socialism. Depending upon the hierarchic formations of these six signifiers, five state discourses became hegemonic. I narrated and analyzed these five discourses, although the primary focus was the discourses during the Pahlavi dynasty (1926-1979).

The first state discourse was the discourse of what I called “constitutionalism,” which signified law linked to legal, rational, and constitutional norms as its primary signifier. For example, constitutionalists defined “Islam” in terms of its adherence to legal-rational norms.

From 1926 to 1941, the second discourse of modern absolutism then became the official state discourse. In this discourse, “development” and “security” became the two primary signifiers that gave meanings to other contending discourses. In this discourse, development was linked to education, science, evolution, progressive history, and the West. Security was linked to the state power embodied in Reza Shah. Nationalism was attached to a particular construction of Persian nationalism, which was based on perceiving Iranians as an Aryan race in relational linkage to Germans but differences with Turks and Arabs.

From 1941 to 1951, contending discourses were vying to become the official state discourse, but none succeeded. From 1951 to 1953, the discourse of democratic nationalism became the third state discourse. The primary signifier of this discourse was the “people,” which was linked to concepts, such as citizenship, people’s rights, people’s free will, and civic rights—in relational differences with foreigners. At the time, the word “foreigner” was the code for labeling the British and Russians, but not necessarily the Americans. With the 1953 CIA coup, the state discourse of democratic nationalism collapsed.

From 1953 to 1979, the fourth official state discourse emerged. By signifying development and security, the state tried to govern by making an officially approved civil

society, political parties, history, and religion. From its emergence in 1953, despite having a monopoly over the material and institutional resources of the country, the state nevertheless could not produce legitimacy for itself, so it ruled mostly by fear. However, by the mid-1970s, the state began to lose its representational power to its opponents.

From the mid-1970s, the state could not instill fear or produce legitimacy for its rule. Discursively, Mohamad Reza Shah was turned into a symbol of American imperial domination, and resisting him became a symbol of patriotism. The interpretation of the shah, as one who invoked grandeur, fear, and the divine myth of the king of kings (*shah han shah*.) was changed into a diminutive stature of a “Servant of America.” Even the oil boom of the 1970s delegitimized the regime despite the fact that the regime had raised the people’s standard of living. The military buildup fueled the people resentment rather than producing national pride. An extensive array of modernizing projects and policies angered the people because they were interpreted as further decaying of the Iranian-Muslim Self, which had never existed. By 1979, the state collapsed. In sum, by a genealogical exploration of the state discourses during the Pahlavi dynasty, this dissertation has shown how different ways of imagining Iran produced different policies and practices, which facilitated some possibilities while barring others.

The implication of this dissertation is not just about understanding the past, but how the past has permeated the present—the continuities and changes in how meanings of policies and practices of the current regime in Iran has traces of the past embedded in the exigency of the present. Despite the pervasive argument in the literature, which represents the Islamic Republic as a failure in modernity, the Islamic Republic is a particular case of modernity embedded in social values previously constructed in the contending discourses of Iran. The discourse of the Islamic state in Iran was—and is—a particular construction made possible by the existing



signifiers available in the language—security, development, law, people, class equality, and social ethics. For illustrative purposes, I will briefly review five previous signifiers that have floated into the discourse of the Islamic Republic.

First, similar to previous discourses, “security” is a part of the legitimizing practice of the state. As explained in previous chapters, in both traditional and modern Iranian monarchisms, providing security was associated the divine right of sovereignty and both words of security and sovereignty were metonyms in the language. Discursively, the absolute right of kings was represented as a divine political order because kings had the absolute power to provide security. Similarly, in the Islamic discourse, providing security is still a legitimizing signifier for the supreme leader whose task is to secure Islam and Iran from physical and cultural threats from “foreigners.” Although the meaning attached to the word “foreigners” has changed in the last twenty-nine years as it had changed many times over in previous discourses, the linkage between providing security and the divine right of sovereignty has remained the same as those during prior eras.

What has changed from the past is the previous linkage between the shah as personification of the sovereign and the divine right of sovereignty. For many centuries, the Shi’i clerical establishment reproduced and reinforced this linkage. The clergy argued that the shah was indeed the personification of the sovereign and therefore had the divine right of sovereignty. However, this linkage began to come apart in the 1960s, and by the 1970s, Islamists declared that the shah’s claim to the divine right of sovereignty was heresy. In a 1971 declaration, Ayatollah Khomeini articulated his opinion as to why monarchic order in general has been incompatible

with Islam since the passing of Prophet Mohammad in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> For nationalists, however, this linkage had been broken during the Mussadiq's years. For socialists, the linkage has been between proletariat class, communist party, security, and the sovereign. In the Islamic Republic discourse, as the linkage between the shah as the personification of the sovereign and the divine right of sovereignty embodied in him disappeared, a new linkage was constructed . The Shi'i clerical establishment became the new embodiment of the sovereign bestowed with the divine right of sovereignty. In other words, while the linkage providing security and having the divine right of sovereignty remained unchanged, the embodiment of the sovereign changed from the shah to the Shi'i clerical institution headed by Ayatollah Khomeini first and now by Ali Khamenei, the current supreme leader.

However, fundamental differences have occurred between the present and the past. In previous eras, the shah ruled independently of the state-elites, and in some cases, in competition with the state and tribal elites. In the Islamic discourse, the state rules by consensus and is bound to strict institutional norms. In other words, unlike the fragmented body of the state-elites in the previous shah-centered state, the state-elites in the Islamic Republic are a unified body. They are deeply embedded in the discourse of Islamic Republicanism. The new order of the elites, unlike the previous ones, can coherently defend the system by making seemingly contradictory decisions. Most Western analysts mistakenly categorize the state-elites into a binary opposition between moderates and fundamentalists. But these binary representations are as useless as when analysts used to categorize Mohamad Reza Shah as the modernizing king of Iran counterpoised to his supposedly "radical" opposition from the left and the right—socialists, nationalists, and

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<sup>1</sup>In other words, for 1400 hundred years, from the perspective of Khomeini and also the state-elites, a legitimate Islamic order had not existed, and the Islamic Republic is only the second legitimate Islamic order to be established after the 13-year reign of Prophet Mohammad in Medina.

Islamists. Although these binary representations reveal one dimension of any state, they hide or mute other aspects.

Second, about the people's role in the Islamic Republic, the state values democracy (*mardum salari*). But citizenship rights are defined in terms of religious rights and responsibility rather than secular civic duties as defined in the West. This interpretation has multiple implications, and most of them cannot be explained by binary categorization, such as democratic or undemocratic, freedom or no freedom. Unlike Mohamad Reza Shah's regime, which did not have mobilization, institutional, and infrastructural power, the Islamic Republic can at times mobilize millions of people. It has command over a small but cohesive, loyal, and uncritical segment of the civil society whose members are motivated by Shi'i myth and a particular formation of Islamic-Iranian nationalism. Hence, although not democratic by Western standard, the regime is perceived as a legitimate and democratic order by its social base.

Third, the Islamic state represents modernism, progress, and development as universal values and therefore good. Previously, contending discourses represented Mohamad Reza Shah's developmental policies and practices as signs of "foreign" domination. In contrast, the Islamic state represents its developmental policies and practices as signs of Iranian self-reliance, progress, modernization, although the degree of Iran's self-reliance is, at best, ambiguous.

Fourth, in the discourse, the Islamic state values class analysis and devalues class inequality as socialists had expressed those in previous decades. This is in contrast to Mohamad Reza Shah, who devalued class analysis and ignored the existence of class gap between the rich and the poor. The Islamic Republic politicizes class inequality and represents it as unjust and un-Islamic. Discursively, although workers are valued, they are not represented in an oppositional relation to capitalists. The state represents the people as *mustazafin* (the repressed, weak, poor,

and faithful) in oppositional relation with *mustakberin* (the decadent, arrogant, and unfaithful). While the state praises *mustazafin* as worthy citizens in the service of Islam regardless of their wealth, it demonizes *mustakberin* for using their wealth or labor in the service of evildoers on earth. In other words, wealth, capital, social status, labor, and power are valued as being positive when committed in the service of Islam or for helping *mustazafin*, but are devalued if used in the service of evil or *mustakberin*. For example, the United States is represented as *estakbar jahani* (the global arrogance), which means having its wealth and power committed to the service of the arrogant rather than the weak and the meek.

Fifth, Islamic-Iranian nationalism has traces of nationalism constructed in previous discourses. For example, it has incorporated socialist nationalism, which focused on class equality in oppositional relation to Western liberalism. It has adopted nationalism from Mussadiq by representing the people as political participants. It has even taken up a part of the Persian nationalism privileged by the late shah, although the focus of the Islamic Republic is on the ancient Persian civilization rather than the Aryan race.

Based on these previously constructed values, the state articulates Islamic-Iranian nationalism in terms of a particular interpretation of Islam that is supposed to unite the body of the nation in its historical struggle against foreign domination, underdevelopment, absolutism, and cultural corruption. This was the initial ideal for building an Islamic nation-state. The first act of the Islamic Republic was to ask the people to vote “yes” or “no” for establishing an Islamic Republic reflected the ideal of the “people’s sovereign,” which had become a dominant social value during 1941-1953. That ideal was labeled as the “Islamic Republic,” and the ideal was represented as the most democratic, class-just, independent, and developing because the state would be an Islamic state. A great majority of the people initially believed and voted for

this ideal-typical model. The people actually treated the utopia of the Islamic Republic as a “real” alternative that would incorporate all “good” and reject all “evil.” The utopias of the Islamic Republic did not, however, take more than a few months to shrink to the size of its constituents—a small but cohesive portion of the population. At the time, the impossibility of the utopia of the Islamic Republic was not, however, imaginable—its simple binary representation appeared to make sense despite its internal contradictions.

This dissertation has argued that analyses based on fixed and immutable political concepts might reveal certain aspects of politics, but hide much more about the intricacies of man as a self-interpreting subject. Meanwhile, the act of ignoring the intersubjective voices embedded in competing social reality limits a better understanding of what might otherwise be possible or not. This is what happened to Reza Shah and Mohamad Reza Shah. They both muted the voices of others within, and, as it turned out, with no tangible outcomes but tremendous cost. This research has argued that tracing the multiplicity of voices from the past into presents facilitates understanding of what might fit within the realm of possibility or not. In the case of Iran, realizing what is possible or not can minimally help avoid costly confrontation and maximally promote better dialogue between the Iranian state and its own society as well as the international community.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Majid Sharifi is a Ph.D. graduate from the University of Florida Department of Political Science where he also earned a Master of Arts degree in international relations. In 2003, he graduated with a Master of Arts degree in political science from the Department of Political Science, Florida International University. In addition to his research program that started in fall 2006, he taught an introductory course in international relations in the Department of Political Science, University of Florida.

Sharifi was born in Iran. As a student activist, he experienced the political environment of Iran before, during, and after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Deeply influenced by the fast-paced changes of political currents in Iran, he decided to write this dissertation about the shifting ideas, meanings, and rationalities of competing images of Iranian nationalism in its modern history. For more than 30 years, he has lived and worked in the United States, but he has never lost his connections to Iran. Sharifi chose to become a teacher for no better purpose than being impressed by his 10<sup>th</sup> grade teacher who wanted him to learn because—his teacher had insisted—the very process of learning changes not only the learner but also the world he lives in.